

The following twelve pieces were written between August 2015 and March 2016. They began with a letter to Sangharakshita's friend and companion, Paramartha, who had been suddenly called away to the other side of the world, and continued over the following weeks and months taking the form of reveries and reminiscences, rather like those collected together in *A Moseley Miscellany* (some of which you can also find on this web-site).

## **Adhithana Writings**

**Urgyen Sangharakshita**

### **1 A Reverie-cum-Reminiscence in the form of a Letter to Paramartha**

Dear Paramartha,

You left last Thursday, and that night I had a dream. I dreamed about my Auntie Kate. She was my mother's elder sister, and when I was very young I often stayed with her in the rather dark upstairs flat in Fulham where she lived with Uncle Dan. She was extremely fond of me even though I was very naughty, pulling out her long hairpins when she had her afternoon nap or even tying her to the back of her chair. Far from minding she would only laugh at my tricks. She was indeed extremely fond of me, and I was extremely fond of her. The dream was quite a short one. I was in my mother's room, waiting for the arrival of Auntie Kate. The room was small and comfortably furnished, like a small nest, and there were colourful rugs on the floor. It was not like any room that my mother had actually ever occupied. In the dream, as in many other dreams, I was of no particular age, and I was not doing anything. I was simply waiting for the arrival of Auntie Kate and listening for her step on the stairs. I eventually heard it, the door opened, and in walked Auntie Kate. She was no bigger than a very small child, and I had to go down on the floor so that we could embrace each other. It was an intensely emotional occasion for both of us. I then woke up. The dream was fled, but my heart was still filled with love for Auntie Kate.

You will agree that it was a strange dream, and I cannot think what might have occasioned it. Though I have dreamt of my mother a number of times, this was the first time I had dreamt of Auntie Kate. And why did she appear in the dream as a small child? The only connection I can make between the dream and a recent happening in my waking life is one that concerned Mallika, though admittedly it is a rather tenuous one. I had recently been told that eighty-five-year-old Mallika was planning to move from Bethnal Green to Aberdeen in order to be near her youngest daughter, even though the move would mean leaving behind all her sangha friends, some of whom had been helping her for years. The words that came to my mind when I heard of this were, 'the leaves return to the tree'. In other words, when we suspect that we may not have much longer to live we often feel a strong urge to return to our place of origin. Mallika was of Scottish origin and perhaps it is not surprising that she should want to go back to Scotland and be near her daughter. My own place of origin was South London, I having been born in Stockwell and brought up in Tooting. Though I am unaware of any urge to go and spend my last days in South London, in recent years I have often dreamt of standing and waiting for the Tooting Broadway bus or Underground train. Sometimes it would arrive, sometimes not, and I would be left waiting. I have also dreamt

that I was sitting in the Tooting Broadway bus and looking out of the window as I waited for the bus to arrive at its destination, where I got out and started walking towards my old home. In some dreams that home would be associated with my mother. In one such dream I was walking home with her and on the way we stopped at a pub, where she had a meal before we continued on our way. In a more recent dream I was with a group of friends and I was anxious because I had promised my mother to be back by eight o'clock and it was now nine-thirty. I would have to get a taxi, I said. Whereupon you stepped forward, saying, 'Don't worry, I'll drive you to your mother's place.' On this occasion, as so often in real life, you were there when I needed you.

I certainly needed you towards the end of 2012. I was to move from Madhyamaloka, where I had lived for sixteen years, to my new home at Adhithana; from a Birmingham suburb to the Herefordshire countryside. At the time I was quite ill. I was suffering from insomnia, which Temazepam sleeping tablets did little to relieve. Indeed, they made me feel worse. Moreover a doctor at the local surgery whom I had not seen before had prescribed a very high dose of Mirtazapine and this I was taking regularly with the Temazepam and my other medication. Thus during the last two weeks of February I was not at all in good shape. Yet the move still had to be made. In fact I felt that it had to be made as soon as possible. I had the strong conviction, whether rational or irrational I know not, that otherwise I could die before getting to Adhithana, and I wanted desperately to get there and spend my last days within its peaceful shades. A great deal of packing had to be done, and done quickly. Ill as I was I helped Vidyaruchi pack the images and books from my study. You, almost single-handedly, packed everything else that was in the flat and in the treasury next door. This included crockery, kitchen utensils, clothes, books, pictures, box files, thangkas and more than ninety rupas of various kinds. You worked like a Trojan, if that is not too hackneyed an expression, or even like demon, but the term would be incompatible with what one of your friends calls your 'angelic disposition'. Eventually, everything was packed, and at 11.30 a.m. on Sunday, 24 February 2013, we set off for Adhithana. You were at the wheel, tired but determined. With us in the car was Vidyaruchi, while Ashvajit followed in his own vehicle. We had not gone very far when I started feeling nauseous, and we had to stop for a few minutes. As we entered the motorway you warned me that it would not be possible for you to drive as slowly as I might have wished. An hour and a half later we had reached our destination and were being welcomed by the Adhithana team.

Two and a half years have passed since that day. The rest of 2013 proved to be a difficult time for me. Adhithana was still a building site, with noisy heavy machinery operating each day of the week until August, when Adhithana had its official opening. I was still very ill, with only very small improvements in my condition from month to month. Fortunately, my new GP reduced my Mirtazapine from the highest to the lowest dose, which seemed to help. I continued to suffer from insomnia, and I often felt – and looked – exhausted. I also suffered from night sweats, which were often so heavy that I had to change my pyjamas and even my bedding in the course of the night. My first months in my new home were thus neither very peaceful nor very happy. Nonetheless, I saw visitors from time to time and kept up with my correspondence as best I could. Dictating letters, especially letters to old friends, was one of my few sources of pleasure. It provided me with an outlet for creativity, albeit a limited one, and the more creative I could be the better I felt. My principal source of

pleasure was the evenings in study and discussion I spent with a close friend. This friend, as you know, was you. You were not always at Adhithana. There were times when your professional work took you to London and other parts of England, but wherever you were you kept in touch with me and made sure that I was being looked after. I sometimes think that without you I would not have come through 2013 even as well as I did. Nothing was too much trouble for you, even when it meant sacrificing your own comfort and convenience. As I came to realize, there were times when you sacrificed even your health and well-being for my sake. More than once I tried to expostulate with you on this account, but you were always emphatic that there was no question of any sacrifice. You did what you did of your own free will and you would not have chosen to be in any other situation. Yet I know that 2013 was a difficult year for you, as it was for me. Even so, you never complained.

By the end of the year my health had improved sufficiently for you to be able spend a month in New Zealand with your mother, leaving me in the hands of Buddhadasa (who had arrived in April), of Suvajra (who had finally arrived in November), and of Ashvajit who had become my secretary in succession to Vidyaruchi. On your return at the end of January 2014, it did not take us long to get back into the previous year's routine. Indeed I had not departed from it very much while you were away. One of the things I had most missed during your absence, apart from your actual presence, was our evening study and discussion. This we did, as before, on those days when you were 'at home', though I cannot remember when we started. What I do remember is that having enjoyed a dip into Neoplatonism we immersed ourselves first in the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*, then in the much longer *Śūraṅgamasamādhi Sūtra*. As we soon discovered, if we had not known it before, the two sutras are very different in character, and breathe as it were different atmospheres. The *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* is of a more philosophical nature, while the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi Sūtra* is more mythical, though in their different ways both point to the transcendental dimension of existence. While the first called for more discussion, as well as for note taking, on your part, the second demanded a more imaginative response. Though I had long wanted to study the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi Sūtra*, I did not at first take to it, and it was only after we had spent two or three evenings on it that I began to feel at all at home in its radiant world. It was a world inhabited by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, by gods and goddesses of various kinds, and towards the end of the sutra there appears the cunning and malignant figure of Mara, the Evil One. As the weeks and months of study and discussion went by I felt that I was not merely a spectator of this world but living in it and breathing its unique atmosphere. Moreover, the sutra came to be increasingly dominated by the figure of the great and glorious Mañjuśrī, the Bodhisattva of wisdom, who appears as a supremely beautiful youth clad in princely garments and holding to his heart the scripture of Perfect Wisdom. With this figure I was already familiar, through my practice of the Mañjughōṣa Stuti Sādhana, but the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi Sūtra* gave me a much more vivid awareness of his presence and of his true nature. He was the veritable embodiment of the *dharma niyāma* and to be worshipped and meditated upon as such. Whether I shared this insight with you at the time I cannot remember. Thus the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi Sūtra* became a permanent part of my spiritual life, as I believe it did yours.

Thus far had my recollections led me when I reminded myself that although my short-term memory was reliable as regards events, it was less reliable as regards the chronology of

those events. I therefore decided that I had better consult you about the sequence of our studies, as I knew you had kept a diary at the time. I could not consult you face to face, as you are now in New Zealand, having left Adhithana a few days before I started writing this letter to you. I therefore had to consult you by telephone last night. This morning came a message with the desired information. According to your diary, we studied the two sutras not in 2014, as I had supposed, but during the last four months of 2013. The discrepancy does not affect my recollection of the two sutras themselves, especially that of the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi Sūtra*. The world of this sutra is as much beyond time as it is beyond space, and while I was in it I too was beyond time. Strictly speaking, I should not even be locating my experience of the sutra in the past. As I have already said, it remains a permanent part of my spiritual life.

Although we may not have studied the two sutras in 2014, we did study other things on the evenings when you were 'at home', or at least, we engaged in discussion. Sometimes the discussion was very personal, and went very deep. During the same year my health continued to improve, especially after I stopped taking Zopiclone sleeping tablets, and it has continued to improve this year. By the end of May you were able to take me away on holiday. We spent six days in north Somerset. This was the farthest I had been away from Adhithana since my arrival there nearly two years earlier, and at first I was concerned that I might not be able to make the journey. But my fears proved to be unfounded. I enjoyed the journey and enjoyed the holiday itself.

The bungalow we had taken was rather isolated and very quiet, and in the course of our stay we went out on only three of the six days we were there. Our first expedition was to Burnham-on-Sea and the coast, for you will remember that I very much wanted to see the sea, which I had not seen since we were in Felixstowe five years earlier. I did see the thin, dark blue line of the sea in the distance, but there was a strong wind blowing, and we stayed on the promenade only long enough for you to push me for a few dozen yards in the wheelchair we had brought with us. You did some shopping and we had a drink in a café in the smart little town. While I had not seen Burnham-on-Sea before, Glastonbury was a place with which we were both familiar. We did not attempt to climb the Tor but from below gazed up at the tower that crowns its summit, and a sociable fellow pilgrim was kind enough to take a photograph of us with the Tor and its tower in the background. This photo, together with a couple of others, you later put on my Facebook page. We also spent some time in the historic little town, where we explored the second-hand bookshops and had a drink in a rambling old café with rough wooden tables and benches. While you were getting our drinks, I became aware that sitting at the next table there was a group of young people and that from them there drifted towards me an aroma with which I had been familiar in the sixties and seventies. Our last expedition was to Cheddar Gorge, which I had not seen before but which you had visited with Jinaraja. I had not realized that it was so big or so impressive, and as we drove through it I gazed up at the rocky cliffs on either side with feelings of wonder and awe. Having driven through the whole length of the gorge, which was much longer than I had expected, we turned round and drove back through it to the little town from which Cheddar Gorge takes its name. Here we could find not a single empty parking space and in any case there was no disabled parking. We therefore drove on, and after a few miles were so fortunate as to come upon a wayside tea-house.

All three outings took place in the morning. We left the bungalow soon after breakfast and returned in time for lunch, which tended to be a late one. During our stay you cooked not only all our lunches, dinners, and breakfasts but also did all the washing up, laundering and Hoovering, doing everything with your usual smoothness and efficiency. Our afternoons and evenings, and the whole day when we did not go anywhere, we spent quietly at the bungalow. When planning our holiday we had talked of the study we would do and the discussions we would have, but so far as I remember we had only one session of study and there was little discussion between us. In fact we talked very little. Our study was concerned, I think, with the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*, which we had been studying during the previous two months for the second time. I was particularly struck by the fact that according to the sutra the Buddha's teaching was a *miśra dharma*, or a mixed, or mingled, or integrated *dharma*, drawing as it did upon the teachings of all three *yānas*, these being the *yānas* of the *śrāvaka*, the *pratyekabuddha*, and the Bodhisattva. As I had quickly perceived, Triratna teaches a *miśra dharma*, drawing as it does not only on these three *yānas* but drawing on, and integrating, teachings from all the major forms of Buddhism. When not cooking or cleaning, you spent much of your time reading and meditating or sitting outside in the sun, which I also did once or twice. I did virtually nothing apart from eating and sleeping. I felt no need to talk, or even to think. There seemed to be between us and all around us a great ocean of silence in which we were both content to live, move, and have our being. Later on, when we had returned to Adhithana, you in fact remarked that it had been more like a retreat than a holiday.

June and July and the first three weeks of August passed quickly, and soon our holiday was a beautiful dream. Nor was it long before you were back at work, travelling to London and other places, while I returned to seeing visitors and dealing with correspondence. Adhithana was then a hive of activity. Besides servicing the different retreats that were going on there, the resident sangha was busy making arrangements to celebrate my ninetieth birthday with a series of special events. Neither of us had much to do with these arrangements, though we could not help knowing what was going on. Whenever you were at home we continued spending our evenings in study and discussion. This time we started going through the papers that Subhuti had produced on the basis of his discussions with me five or six years ago. We had gone through three papers, and were going through a fourth, when you received the news that your mother was seriously ill. For a couple of days you were quite perplexed, not knowing what to do. You wanted to be with me on my birthday, but you also wanted to do the best you could for your mother. In the end it was decided that you should leave for New Zealand immediately. You left Adhithana on Thursday, 20 August, having booked a flight that would leave Heathrow the following day. To an observer our parting might have seemed a very matter of fact affair, but each knew what the other felt and there was no need for words.

Three days later, on Sunday 23 August, you were in Christchurch from whence you sent me your first letter. It was a clear, crisp day, you wrote, with the mountains covered with snow. From Christchurch you flew to Invercargill where you found your mother in good spirits, all things considered. It was not long before you realized, however, that you might have to remain in New Zealand for quite a long time. Whether the time be long or short, your

absence will surely be felt by those of whose lives you are an important part. Deji will feel it, as will the depleted Annexe Team, which now consists of Buddhadasa, Suvajra, and Sthanashraddha, my new secretary, assisted from time to time by Mahamati and Yashodeva. I, too, will feel your absence, of course. How much I will feel it, you only will know.

Two days after your departure, when you were still in the air, Adhithana saw the launching of my new book, *A Moseley Miscellany*. It was not clear whether or not I would be attending the event, but in the end I did attend it, and was deeply touched by the reception I received from the four hundred Order members who had gathered in the marquee. In the evening, after dinner, I wrote an account of the launch while it was fresh in my memory, and this account I now insert in the present letter.

‘Buddhadasa, Suvajra, and I left the Annexe for the big marquee a few minutes before five. As we did so, there were loud rumbles of thunder and the rain fell very heavily. We drove through ‘tent city’, which I had not seen before, and up to the back entrance of the marquee, where I was received by Yashodeva and Lokeshvara. Once inside I took my seat on my mother’s chair (transported to the marquee for the occasion) with Parami on my right and Buddhadasa on my left. All this time, everyone was chanting the Śākyamuni mantra. Parami then said a few words, after which Subhuti very capably introduced Kalyanaprabha at some length. While he was speaking the rain poured down heavily, so that he had to raise his voice above the uproar despite having the help of the microphone. Kalyanaprabha herself then spoke. She spoke very beautifully, and fortunately the rain stopped just as she began. Her voice was loud and clear, and she gave a résumé of the contents of *A Moseley Miscellany*. There must have been nearly four hundred Order members present and the marquee was full to capacity. I was then given a large birthday cake and presented with a beautifully bound birthday card from the thousand and more Order members who had contributed to the £110,000 for the *Complete Works* and for translations.<sup>1</sup> This was the signal for everyone to sing ‘Happy Birthday’. Buddhadasa, Suvajra and I then returned to the Annexe, by which time the skies had cleared. The whole event had lasted for about 45 minutes. I was told that as I entered the marquee many people, both men and women, were in tears. One thing I forgot to mention was that after I had taken my seat I was garlanded by a young Dharmacharini with a flower garland that she and Sanghamani had made. Suvajra now tells me that several Order members who went outside the marquee while Subhuti was introducing Kalyanaprabha saw a rainbow over the Annexe!’

My ninetieth birthday came four days after the book launch and I spent it quietly. Not much was happening at Adhithana, and after lunch Suvajra drove me round to the Library, where Saddhanandi and Danasamudra gave me a guided tour of the Nine Decades exhibition that had been set up there. Fortunately you were able to see the exhibition shortly before you left, so I shall not attempt to describe it. Suffice it to say that it showed both imagination and professionalism on the part of those who set it up and that it would have graced any museum. So far as I remember, the idea for the exhibition came either from you or was the

outcome of a discussion between you and Saddhanandi. During the months preceding my birthday Saddhanandi and I met up every few weeks, or even every few days, depending on circumstances. We dealt with one decade at a time. Saddhanandi would describe the three objects representing the decade, then ask me about them and about my life at that time. She was an excellent interviewer, putting questions that enabled me to express myself fully and freely. By the time we reached the ninth decade we had produced what proved to be a highly popular overview of my life, and a friendship has sprung up between us.

I have now come to the end of this odd 'Reverie-cum-Reminiscence' of mine, cast in the form of a letter to you, and I must admit that I do not know how to proceed. Perhaps a reverie or a reminiscence simply goes on and on till it peters out and I think the time has now come for me to say *finis*. I have enjoyed writing it even if I've not always written about enjoyable things, and I hope that you will enjoy reading it.

Yours with much love, as ever,

Bhante

## **2 Old Mr Boutell**

I never met my father's stepfather but he was an important influence on me in my early life. He had been in the merchant navy and it was he who had brought back from China and other countries the curios that so fascinated me whenever I visited my grandmother. A large photograph of him hung on the wall in her kitchen, opposite a smaller photograph of my own grandfather. He had a smooth round face with a heavy moustache, and his eyes looked out on the world with a calm, clear gaze. I do not know when the photograph was taken but he must have been about thirty at the time. Neither do I know when he married my grandmother or when he died. There were two children of the marriage, a girl and a boy. There was Dorothy who died before I was born, and Charles, who was ten years younger than my father and whom I knew quite well. My father always spoke of him either as 'Dad' or as 'the Old Man' and my mother used to refer to him as 'Old Mr Boutell'. He could be violent, and it seems that when he was really angry the only person who dared stand up to him was my mother. More than once did her intervention save Charles from a beating and it was therefore not surprising that he should always have been quite fond of her.

There were times when Old Mr Boutell was drunk. Not that he liked to drink alone. He liked to drink in the company of his male friends. Every two or three weeks the big front room of the flat would be the scene of a rather rowdy party. Crates upon crates of beer would arrive beforehand, my father once told me, and on some nights there might be as many as twenty or thirty revellers. There would be a lot of talking and laughing, shouting and singing. At such times my grandmother would keep out of the way. One of the revellers was Harry Lauder, the Scottish entertainer, who lived nearby, and who may well have entertained the company with a rendering of his well known *I Love a Lassie*. Where the money came from I do not know.

Old Mr Boutell had no regular occupation, and he spent the whole day at home. His hobby was breeding prize bulldogs. When a pup was old enough he would tease it with a piece of rag until it became angry and clamped its teeth on the offending object, whereupon he would whirl the pup round and round in the air. If it kept hold of the rag it was a good bulldog and he would rear it. He must have hated cats as much as he loved bulldogs. Whenever one strayed into the small back garden he would catch it and kill it, burying the body at the foot of a grapevine that he was trying to grow in a corner of the garden.

Besides the curios he had collected, the Old Man possessed a formidable array of live shells of various kinds, one of which exploded when he was handling it, blowing off a thumb. After his death, my grandmother directed my father to get rid of these dangerous toys. Very gingerly he packed them in a suitcase and took them to the nearest police station, but the police refused to have anything to do with them. Chuck them into the nearest pond they told him. The suitcase must have rotted away long ago, but it is not unlikely that the shells are still lying at the bottom of a pond on Tooting Bec Common.

My grandmother got rid of a lot of other things as well. She herself once told me that soon after her husband's death she had thrown away all the grass skirts with which the walls of the front staircase were decorated. She was tired of having to dust them every day, she declared. She also got rid of some of the other curios. One of the ways in which she did this, to my great delight, was to give them to me, sometimes as a birthday or Christmas present. In this way I came into the possession of a pair of opium pipes with jade mouthpieces, a chopstick set, and a thunderbolt. He had acquired the thunderbolt, the Old Man had once told my father, when he was in South Africa. During a thunderstorm he had taken shelter in a bungalow with a corrugated iron roof and the thunderbolt had pierced through the roof and buried itself deep in the earth not far from his feet. He had dug it up, and it proved to be two inches in diameter and quite heavy.

Many of the curios he had collected were of Chinese provenance and in this connection, too, the Old Man had a story to tell. He was in Peking (this must have been around the turn of the century), and had acquired a number of ornate jugs, basins, and other vessels, all of solid gold. These he had packed in a strong wooden box and sent home by sea, but the box never arrived at its destination. Had it arrived, he had once told my father, he would have been a very rich man.

### **3 The Young Philip Lingwood**

When I was very young my great pleasure was to spend time with my father. One of the reasons I liked spending time with him was that he used to talk to me telling me the names of flowers and trees and the stars, for although he lived and worked in the city he was at heart a countryman. He did not talk much about himself or about his own early life, though he may well have told me much that I have forgotten. His father having died when he was a



few years old, his mother had sent him to live with his grandmother in Besthorpe, a village near Attleborough in Norfolk, where she herself had been born and brought up. There my father attended the village school. I remember once seeing a group photo of the children of the school, perhaps two or three dozen in number, seated in rows in front of the school building. Boys and girls alike, they all wore white pinafores. In the middle of one of the rows sat the small figure of my father. I cannot remember whether I was able to recognize him or whether my father pointed him out to me. My father was very fond of his grandmother, and must have lived with her and her blind husband for much of his childhood. He more than once told me how he went scrumping with the village boys and how they used to be chased by the farmers whose fruit they stole.

How old my father was when his mother brought him back to London, to live with her and his younger sister and, later, with his stepfather, I do not know. She must have been living at 23 Sellincourt Road, Tooting, where I was to spend my own childhood, for I know that my father attended the Sellincourt Road School. He had little or nothing to say about his schooldays, except that he used to fight with other boys. Like them, he must have left school at fourteen and started looking for work.

It would appear that he was soon working for a jeweller. Whether he had been apprenticed in the traditional way, or was simply an employee, was never clear to me. The only reason I think he may have been apprenticed is that he 'lived in' and that with him there were other boys, whether apprentices or not. They were mischievous boys and played tricks on the establishment's elderly housekeeper. One of their tricks, my father once told me, was to catch cockroaches and string them at eye level across the passage where the short-sighted woman would, to her horror, bump into them. My father remembered the jeweller quite fondly, for he seems to have been a favourite of his. From time to time he would give him semi-precious stones, including several garnets, all of which in time came into my possession.

Then came the war, and it was not long before my father enlisted. 'Mum,' he told his mother, 'I've joined up.' She was not a woman of many words. 'Well,' she said, 'it's your decision, and you will have to live with it.' In what year my father enlisted I do not know, but at the time he could not have been more than sixteen or seventeen. Like many other young men at that time, he had given a false age and the authorities were naturally disinclined to question his word. I remember seeing a photograph taken of him shortly after he enlisted. The face that looked out from under the peak of the big army hat had an expression of shyness and self-consciousness, though at the same time it was evident that young Philip Lingwood was not devoid of self-assurance. Soon he was in France and living in the mud and blood of the trenches with other young men, hearing the dull thud of the heavy artillery of both sides and the screaming of shells overhead. Fragments from one of these shells hit him, and when he regained consciousness he was lying in a field hospital tent with a badly damaged and very painful right arm and hand. My memory next finds him an inmate of St Benedict's Hospital, Tooting, and wearing, like the other inmates, the light blue suit and red tie of the convalescent soldier. As a young man he had a hot temper, and he once told me that while at St Benedict's he had fought with another soldier, despite his injured arm, and had been pulled off him by one of the nurses in a way he found excruciatingly

painful. His only other anecdote from this period of his life related to my mother. She was then a member of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) and her work sometimes took her to the hospital, which is how she and my father met. They used to go out together and sometimes, when he had stayed out after hours, she would help him climb back over the wall. From St Benedict's my father went to the Lord Roberts Workshops by which time he must have been discharged from the army. At the Lord Roberts Workshops, where disabled ex-servicemen were taught a trade, he opted for French polishing, and soon was able to earn a living. One day he said to his mother, 'Mum, I am going to get married.'

'Well,' she said laconically, in words she had once used before, 'It's your decision, and you will have to live with it.'

#### **4 Some Bombay Friends**

They ran down the slope holding hands, laughing like happy children. The scene was the garden of The Residence, Gangtok, where they were staying as guests of Apa Pant, the Political Officer, with whom I also sometimes stayed. It was my first sight of Maurice and Hilla. We soon became acquainted, and they invited me to visit them at their Bombay home the next time I was in the city. The time must have been the mid-1950s.

Maurice Frydman was Polish, had spent some time in a Jesuit seminary, had come to India before the war, and for some years had worked as a civil engineer in Aundh, the smallest of the princely states. The ruler of the state was known as the Chief of Aundh and in Maurice's time the chief minister happened to be Apa Pant, the ruler's son. The two men had become friends and they had kept up their friendship after Independence, which was how Maurice and Hilla came to be staying with Apa Pant in Gangtok. Maurice was a very small man, with a big head of the long, dolichocephalic type, and he had one shoulder higher than the other. He always wore a white Indian shirt, over white pyjama pants, both garments being of *khadi* or hand-loomed cloth, for in matters economic Maurice was a staunch Gandhian. The costume was completed by a shoulder bag, in which he carried his spectacles and various papers, and by a pair of large black army boots. His white hair was close-cropped, his light blue eyes had the innocence of a child, while his thin face generally wore a mildly beatific smile. At the time of our first meeting he must have been in his mid-sixties. Hilla Petit was a Parsi by birth. She was rather taller than Maurice, and wore her grey hair bobbed in European style. She was probably older than Maurice and I never knew how they had originally met.

Maurice and Hilla lived in Bombay, in the exclusive Malabar Hill district. Whenever I was in Bombay I used to visit them at their ground floor flat on the Nepean Sea Road. In the living room there was much old-fashioned black teak furniture, which evidently had once graced a much bigger room. I particularly remember an elaborately carved settee some ten or twelve feet in length which could have comfortably accommodated seven or eight persons. From the centre of the ceiling there was suspended a huge crystal chandelier, which hung so low that a moderately tall person had to take care not to pass beneath it. The dining room was dark. If I happened to visit them in the morning, Hilla would press me, very

warmly, to stay for lunch, which I often did. Lunch was a strange meal for Hilla liked everything to be passed through a blender, so that it all had the same consistency. With us at table there would be Hilla's adopted daughter, then twelve or thirteen years old. Hilla doted on her, but Maurice had doubts about the wisdom of a middle-class, childless woman taking over the daughter of her servants, and in effect alienating her socially and culturally from her parents, who in this case were Goanese Catholics, as were many servants in Bombay. Despite his doubts, Maurice accepted the situation and liked to joke that theirs was what he called a synthetic family, rather than one made in the natural way

Once I stayed on so long after lunch that both Maurice and Hilla pressed me to stay the night, which in the end I did. Maurice insisted on giving up his room to me, saying he would sleep on the floor in Hilla's room. His room was quite small and on three of its walls there hung huge framed portraits of Gandhi, Ramana Maharshi and Krishnamurti. So large were they that they dominated the room, which contained little more than a mattress and a few books. These three were Maurice's heroes. Gandhi had been assassinated in 1948, Ramana Maharshi had died peacefully in 1950, but Krishnamurti was still alive, as I was soon to be reminded. On going to see my two friends one morning I found them in a state of suppressed excitement. Krishna-ji was in Bombay, they hastened to tell me, and he would be giving a few talks. On no account should I miss hearing him. They had some influence with the organizers of the talks, they added, and they would make sure I had a good seat. I was touched by their eagerness that I should hear Krishnamurti, and gladly accepted their offer. The name of Krishnamurti was well known to me. I had read some of his talks, and knew something of his history. As a boy he had been 'discovered' by the Theosophist Charles Leadbeater, had been educated in England, and had been promoted by Leadbeater and Annie Besant as the new World Teacher, the Maitreya of the Buddhists, and the Messiah of the Christians, and a cult had developed around him. Krishnamurti had eventually broken free of the Theosophists, dramatically rejecting the claims they had made on his behalf, claims which it seems he had once accepted. Since then he had travelled the world denouncing every form of religious faith and had, paradoxically, again become the centre of a cult! It was therefore not surprising that I should have wanted to see Krishnamurti in the flesh, and hear him speak.

Maurice and Hilla having been as good as their word, I had a seat near the side of the platform. There were about three hundred people in the hall, representing the cultural elite of Bombay. They sat on chairs rather than on the floor in the traditional manner and there was an expectant hush in the air. When Krishnamurti entered I observed him closely. He was tall and thin, with long grey hair, and he was dressed in a kind of white robe. His face was deeply lined, and his expression, I thought, was one of intense suffering. He reminded me of a fallen archangel. He spoke in English, with a public school accent. The gist of his talk was that the unconditioned was to be found in the conditioned, though how it was to be found he did not say. As I knew from the talks I had read, he did not believe there was such a way. The path to reality was a pathless path, nor did it lead anyone anywhere. The talk was not all on this high level. At one point Krishnamurti exclaimed in tones of withering scorn, 'There you all are, rotting beneath your *Bhagavad Gītās!*' A sigh of satisfaction passed through the audience. This was what they wanted. This was what they had come to hear. They were like a Christian congregation responding with deep satisfaction to the denunciations of the hell-

fire preacher who told them they were all damned. After the talk there were questions from the audience.

‘Sir, we have been following you and listening to you for forty years,’ said a woman of western appearance, her voice quivering with emotion, ‘but we have not got anywhere.’ I do not remember what Krishnamurti said in reply. What I do remember is that a number of people turned towards the woman with expressions of irritation and annoyance. How could she be so obtuse, they seemed to be saying. After the meeting Maurice and Hilla were eager to know what I thought of Krishnamurti’s talk. I had enjoyed it very much, I said, as indeed I had. Whereupon they offered to make arrangements for me to hear the rest of his talks, evidently assuming that having once had a taste of him I could not but want more. I declined the offer. Krishnamurti believed that one should not try to repeat an experience, I reminded them, and I had no intention of trying to repeat the experience I had been vouchsafed that evening. I also asked Maurice about his hero’s condemnation of the study of the *Bhagavad Gītā* and other scriptures. If it was wrong to study them, why did he allow his talks to be published in book form? Krishna-ji’s books, Maurice retorted, were not books but slices of experience. This by no means satisfied me. If his books were slices of experience, I wanted to know, were not the *Bhagavad Gītā* and other scriptures also slices of experience?

Maurice had three heroes, but Hilla seemingly had only one, as I discovered when she showed me her room one day. Inside the door, to the right, there was a kind of sideboard on which stood, all in silver frames, twenty or more photographs of Krishnamurti at different stages of his life. A stick of incense was burning. There were other differences between the two friends. Hilla sometimes liked to talk, but she could not be described as talkative, whereas Maurice could be extremely talkative. He was very fond of giving advice, regardless of whether or not it was wanted. He gave it good-naturedly and seemed not to mind if it was not taken. I was a particular object of his solicitude. He appeared to think that I was young and inexperienced, and needed the guidance of those who were older and wiser. He was especially concerned to advise me on my work among the ex-Untouchables, as they were then called, who in 1956 had converted to Buddhism under the leadership of Dr Ambedkar. He gave me advice on this subject whenever we met, as well as sometimes advising me in writing. Not that Maurice ever wrote letters. He wrote only postcards. His handwriting was so big that on a postcard there was room only for a couple of short sentences and his signature. His advice was often too general to be useful, but once he said something that made a deep impression on me. ‘Sangharakshita,’ he once said, taking me by the arm, ‘you are wasting your time teaching these people about Buddhism. They do not need a Buddha. What they need is a Manu.’ As I knew, Manu was the legendary Indian Law-giver, whose code governed every aspect of Hindu social life from the cradle to the grave, and I could not but acknowledge that there was truth in Maurice’s words. More than once had I found, on meeting a group of newly converted Buddhists, that they did not ask about Buddhist philosophy, or about meditation, or even about ethics. Their first question was invariably, ‘Now that we are Buddhists, how are we to perform the marriage ceremony?’

Although many of the new Buddhists were illiterate, especially in the rural areas, there had sprung up, even before 1956, a small educated elite. To this elite belonged Professor Shewalay. I do not remember how we first met, but it must have been in or near the Siddharth College of Arts and Science in Bombay, where he taught. He had brought with

him in his tiffin box a little wad of chapattis, and it being lunchtime he offered me one. I took the chapatti and we continued our conversation. Afterwards he told me how impressed he had been by the matter of fact way that I had taken the chapatti. He came from an ex-Untouchable community, he explained, and although untouchability had been outlawed in India there were many Caste Hindus who would not accept food from his hands or even touch him. The fact that I had accepted a chapatti from him meant that we were friends. He was a small man, even smaller than Maurice, and unlike Maurice he wore a Western style jacket and trousers, complete with collar and tie, and he had a mop of black hair. His eyes were unusually bright and his thin face at times wore a sweet smile. His voice was rather loud for such a small man, and his laugh was unpleasantly raucous. Even in ordinary conversation he tended to hold forth emphatically, as though he was lecturing a class of rather dull students. As I soon discovered, Shewalay was a very ambitious man. His ambition was to create a Buddhist university. In his own mind, indeed, the University already existed. He would say such things as, 'The University will be closed next week', or, 'Pali classes will be held at the University at eight o'clock every evening', and so it stood before him in all the glory of bricks and mortar. Pali classes were indeed held, but they were held in a room at Siddharth College and they were taken by Shewalay himself. Though his subject was history, Pali grammar was his passion. Unfortunately, my friend was not a good communicator. All he did was drill the thirty or more new Buddhists who came to his classes in declensions and conjugations. 'I love teaching Pali grammar', he told me enthusiastically, his eyes shining. But the students had come not for declensions and conjugations but for the Dhamma, and gradually they stopped coming.

It was around this time that I got to know Muriel Payne OBE. I was introduced to her by Maurice, who had known her for many years. She was a tall, well-built woman of about fifty, with well groomed white hair, and she wore a simple blue dress. Her manner was dignified but friendly, and her face wore a pleasant smile. She was an educationist and had been awarded her OBE for her work in the field of Indian education. She was also a trained nurse, and during the war she had lived with Krishnamurti for six months and nursed him through a mental breakdown. In the course of her work with schools in different parts of India she had noticed that there was no real communication between teachers and pupils, just as I had noticed that there was none between Shewalay and his Pali students, and that it was largely owing to this lack of communication that educational standards were so low. She had also noticed that there was little communication between the teachers themselves or even between some husbands and wives. In order to remedy this appalling situation she had devised what she called 'communication exercises'. Though she was no writer she had written a book with the title *Creative Education*, in which the exercises were described. I was fascinated by all this, for the exercises helped one to become more aware of the person with whom one was communicating, and mindfulness or awareness was an important Buddhist virtue. So fascinated was I that one day I told Miss Payne, as she was always called, that if she would agree to teach the exercises to a group of people, I would undertake to find both the people and a venue for the course. The result was that for three or four successive evenings she taught the 'communication exercises' to me and about twenty other people, all friends of mine, including Professor Shewalay. I found the exercises not only useful in developing awareness but also exhilarating, and I have since taught them to others. Shewalay, not surprisingly, found the very idea of communication difficult to grasp, and

insisted on arguing with Miss Payne instead of doing the exercises. She must have thought of him as being the embodiment of all that was worst in the Indian educational system. Miss Payne had other tricks up her sleeve, so to speak. Happening to notice that there was a slight squint in one of my eyes she asked if I would like her to 'run a process' on me, to which I readily agreed. She then told me to think of an eye, which I did. Could I see the eye? Yes. What was the expression of the eye? 'Oh, it is very angry,' I exclaimed. Next she asked me if I knew where I was, whereupon everything changed. I was a baby and lying on my mother's lap, my mother herself being seated on a low nursing chair. My father's sister, who was also my godmother, was looking down at my mother with an expression of anger that seemed to include me. I think the squint that Miss Payne had noticed disappeared, though it may return at times of stress.

I never met Miss Payne again, and never heard what became of her after I had left India in 1964. Shewalay had told me that one day he would follow in the footsteps of the Buddha quite literally. He would marry, would have a son, and then go forth from home into homelessness, and, as I learned a few years later, this he had actually done. He had married a prostitute (on principle), had had a son, and had been ordained as a *bhikkhu*, under the name of Sivalibodhi. After his ordination he had continued to live with his mother, his wife, and his son, supporting them out of his salary as a professor at the Siddharth College of Arts and Science. Whether he went to work each morning wearing his yellow robe I never knew. Knowing my old friend as I did, I think that he probably did just that.

## **5 Encounters on the Underground**

I was born and brought up in South London, and it was therefore not long before I became acquainted with the extensive network that is the London Underground system. I made my first journey on the Tube, as it was popularly called, when I was six, and I made it in the company of my father. Most likely we were on our way to one of the South Kensington museums. My predominant impression, as we sat in the rapidly moving carriage, was one of stifling heat, and noise so loud that we could hardly hear each other speak. Thereafter I was to make regular use of the Underground both before my departure for India in 1944, and after my return in 1964. It was in the early years of this latter period that I had my four encounters. Two of them took place on the Northern Line and two on the Central Line.

It was eleven o'clock at night, and I was travelling on the Northern Line, heading for north-west London where I was then living. I must have been leading a meditation class or giving a lecture and had stayed on afterwards talking with friends until quite late. My mind still being preoccupied with our discussion, I did not at first take much notice of the person sitting opposite. Eventually I looked at him, or rather, I realized that he was looking at me. He was wearing cherry coloured corduroy trousers and a buttercup-yellow shirt open at the throat. I judged him to be seventeen or eighteen and his beautiful face was lit up with a smile. He was not only looking at me but looking at me with what could only be called love. In fact he seemed to be in love with me. I did not know what to think, especially as the angelic young man was evidently in a state of sexual arousal. Who was he? What did he

want with me? Should I speak to him, or should I wait for him to make the first move? Such were the thoughts that passed through my mind. How long we sat gazing at each other, he with that look of adoration in his eyes, I do not know. It could not have been for more than five minutes for by this time I had reached my destination and had no choice but to alight. The young man did not move. Over the years I have often reflected on the encounter. Had the young man taken LSD, in which case would he have looked at whoever came and sat opposite him with the same love with which he had looked at me? Alternatively, perhaps our paths had crossed in this way because we were meant to be friends and companions and I should not have allowed my habitual cautiousness to prevent me from asking him to go home with me regardless of what some of my friends might think. Whatever I should or should not have done, the vision of the beautiful young man in the cherry-red corduroy trousers and buttercup-yellow shirt remains with me to this day.

My second encounter took place on the Central Line. At the time I was living at Sukhavati, above the FWBO's centre in Bethnal Green, and every few months I would have a little holiday, taking the Tube from Bethnal Green to Tottenham Court Road, from whence I would explore the bookshops of Charing Cross Road. On one such occasion I was caught up in the morning rush, and found myself hemmed in by commuters. To my right was the back of a woman. She had a bag slung over her shoulder and the mouth of the bag was half open. Facing me and the woman's back stood a well dressed man in his thirties. We had not been long on our way before he slid his hand into the woman's bag. I looked at him and slowly shook my head as if to say 'you shouldn't be doing that, you know'. The man smiled and withdrew his hand from the bag. A few minutes later the train stopped, the doors opened, and several people including the pickpocket got out, and the woman and I continued on our way with rather more elbow room than before. Reflecting on the incident afterwards, I concluded that the well dressed man was a professional pickpocket, taking systematic advantage of the cramped conditions that prevailed on the Underground during the morning and evening rush hours.

My next encounter also took place on the Central Line when I was returning from Tottenham Court Road to Bethnal Green. I was sitting at the end of the carriage. Opposite me, but a little nearer to the exit, there sat an elderly couple. The woman had a small closed basket on her lap, from which a faint mewling could be heard. From the other end of the carriage there came towards us a strange figure. He was tall and raw boned and his filthy, tightly fitting clothes clung to him like a second skin. His long hair was unkempt, and his expression was fierce and scowling. As he came he sang in a loud raucous voice accompanying himself with strident strummings on his guitar. As he neared the old couple the gentleman asked him, very politely, not to sing and play so loudly. They had a kitten in their basket, and the noise was frightening it. The man snarled a peremptory refusal and went on singing and playing more loudly than ever. Some people gave him money, others did not. I was one of those who did not give him anything. It was not that I disapproved of buskers, even though busking was illegal, but I was disgusted by his behaviour towards the old couple and their kitten. Far from disapproving of buskers I would generally give them a few coins. At Tottenham Court Road station near the exit from the southbound platform there was a corner in which a busker would be playing. More often than not he or she was an

out of work classical musician, and as one stepped off the escalator one would hear in the distance the sound of a violin or a flute playing a beautiful Bach melody.

From out of work musicians to out of work actors is only a short step, and I am reminded of an encounter, if such it may be called, that took place not on the Underground but in a café. The café was the As You like It, which was situated next door to Sakura, the Buddhist shop, in Monmouth Street, in whose basement the FWBO's first meditation classes were held. After a class, my friend, Terry, and I would sometimes adjourn to As You Like It, where I would have a cup of tea and he his evening meal. Barrie, the owner of the café, was a very thin, very camp man of about thirty-five. He spent much of his time talking on the phone, for As You Like It doubled as a kind of theatrical agency, and there were usually two or three good-looking young actors lounging about. Just inside the entrance there invariably sat a very elderly woman. She was dressed entirely in black, and her black hat made her yellowish features look almost cadaverous. She never spoke to anyone, except for a word to Barrie or to the young actor who brought her meal. It was always a big meal, and probably her one square meal of the day, and I noticed that Barrie never charged her for it. With her she had a large handbag, stuffed full of newspaper cuttings, and when not eating she would take out some of these and study them closely. I never saw her arrive, and I never saw her leave. She seemed to be a permanent fixture of the place.

My last encounter took place on the Northern Line, as I was travelling down to Tottenham Court Road. There were not many people in the carriage and looking along the gangway to the left I saw a man standing with his back towards me in front of the closed doors of the carriage. Of medium height and sturdily built, he wore a dark suit and was bare headed. He was obviously waiting for the next stop. The instant I set eyes on him I said to myself, 'That's not a human being, that's a little devil,' and I decided to keep him under observation. This I could do for only a few minutes, for the train soon came to a halt and the doors slid back. As they did so, the man turned round and very deliberately thumbed his nose at me. He then skipped onto the platform and ran laughing to the exit. It was as though he was saying, 'You haven't caught me yet.'

## **6 Colin Wilson Revisited**

Colin Wilson's *The Outsider* was published in 1956, and a few years later a friend of mine lent me the book with the comment that I would find it interesting. This friend considered himself to be very much an Outsider, as he had more than once told me, and the consciousness that he was an Outsider deeply rankled with him, making him feel bitter and resentful.

That was fifty or more years ago. Though I found the book interesting, I did not follow up the idea of the Outsider until some years later, when I was concerned with the nature of the difference between the individual and the group member, and between the group and the spiritual community. Neither was I then concerned with the question of whether or not I was myself an Outsider in Colin Wilson's sense of the term. As I look back over my life it



appears to me that even if I did not think of myself as an Outsider there were times when I was seen as one by others, at least in certain respects. For the first few years of my life the question of whether or not I was an Outsider did not arise. Indeed, it could not arise for I was born into a family of which I was a fully accepted member from the beginning. I belonged to it, and took the fact of my belonging to it for granted. This happy state of affairs came to an end, to an extent, when at the age of ten or eleven I went back to school after an absence of two or more years. I was absent because I had been confined first to bed and then to a wheelchair, and I was confined to them because I had been diagnosed as suffering from valvular disease of the heart. Even when I was back at school I was not allowed to play games or take part in PT, or even to walk fast, much less still to run. I was not allowed to stand during morning assembly, for it was thought that if I stood for too long it would put a strain on my heart. A classmate was therefore deputed to follow me into the hall carrying a chair, and on this chair I would sit during the hymns, prayers, and announcements. I sat on it even when the rest of the assembly sat on the floor, which made me a very conspicuous figure. In this way I came to be considered different from the other boys and perhaps even as something of an Outsider.

Being an Outsider, if such I was in those days, was not without its advantages. Because I could not run around in the playground with the other boys I stayed in the classroom during breaks and read. Sometimes I had a companion. This was a boy of my own age called Douglas Nicholas. He was fair-haired and green-eyed, with a yellowish complexion, and though he was quite a big boy he was very timid and was known as a cry baby. Since he was afraid of being set upon he did not go out into the playground during breaks and thus sometimes came and sat by me. Though he was timid, he had a vicious streak in his character and liked to pinch me in the leg quite hard so that I was not fond of his company. On leaving school one afternoon I found that Douglas Nicholas was being pinned against a wall by a group of eight or nine boys. They were punching, poking, and pushing him and he was blubbering. Without thinking I pushed my way through the boys, seized Douglas by the hand, and to jeers and catcalls led him away to safety, which meant taking him halfway home, though his home was in a different direction from mine. The incident made me realize that being an Outsider gave me a certain immunity, even a certain status, so that I was able to do things that I could not otherwise have done.

A few years later there came the war, and with the war there came the great evacuation of school children from London to places of safety in the countryside, for it was expected that London would be bombed by the Luftwaffe. The bombing did not come at once, but it did come later, when in 1940 the Luftwaffe rained bombs on London for fifty-seven nights in succession killing 20,000 people and destroying much of the city, including sixteen Wren churches. I had been evacuated a few months earlier, travelling with my suitcase and my gas-mask to distant Devonshire in the company of several dozen classmates. At first I was made welcome, but in my second billet the landlady conceived an aversion to me eventually referring to me as a 'vacuee' in tones that suggested that for her an evacuee was among the lowest forms of human life. To her I was an Outsider, not only because I was an evacuee but because I spoke with a different accent and had interests that were beyond her ken. My younger sister, Joan, had a more positive experience of evacuation. She had been evacuated the previous year to Sussex, being billeted with a farmer and his wife not far from

Chichester. When she had been with them for a couple of months my mother and I paid her a visit. Mr and Mrs Ayling were both in their late thirties. They were childless, and it was soon evident that they treated Joan as their own daughter. Mrs Ayling was like any other housewife, but in his corduroy britches and leather gaiters Mr Ayling was the very picture of a farmer. I do not remember how long the visit lasted, but we stayed long enough to accompany Joan and Mr Ayling to a livestock auction, Mr Ayling having a cow he wanted to sell. It fetched only £2 and I shall not easily forget the look of disappointment, almost of anguish, that passed over his bronzed, handsome face. Back at the farm my mother chatted with the Aylings, while Joan snuggled up to Mr Ayling, and I picked up a book that was lying around. It bore the title *My Life in Time*, and it had been written by Mr Ayling's aunt. As its title suggested, the authoress had a life outside time as well as in it, and I soon discovered that the work was of the occult or 'mystical' type, such as were soon to become known to me through the writings of Mme Blavatsky. This was not the first time that I had picked up and read a book while visiting with my mother.

Not long before our visit to the farm she had taken me to see Auntie Jessie, one of her elder sisters, who lived in a downstairs flat in Chiswick. The visit probably occupied the greater part of the day, for the two sisters had a lot to say to each other, and it was not long before I started looking around for something to read. There was nothing lying around, but in my aunt's living room there was a glass fronted bookcase and in the bookcase I could see several rows of books. Soon I had opened the bookcase and taken out three of the books. These were E. W. Hornung's *Raffles*, and Marie Corelli's *The Mighty Atom* and *Jane*, and by the time my mother and I had said goodbye to Auntie Jessie I had read all three. *Raffles*, the eponymous hero of the novel, is a gentleman crook and the book seemed to be an attempt to make crime look glamorous. Marie Corelli's books were shorter and much more moral. Indeed, I remember them as being full of moral indignation. In *The Mighty Atom* the indignation is directed against those wicked people who thought that children should be brought up without being given any religious instruction. Here the eponymous hero is a dear little boy who hangs himself with his beautiful silk sash because he wants to find out whether or not there is a God. In *Jane* her indignation is directed against the frivolous, loose-living upper classes. The eponymous heroine inherits a fortune and decides to see what fashionable society is like. She buys a big house in London, entertains the highest aristocracy, including royalty, and one evening has the satisfaction of ordering everyone to leave her house at once. Young as I was, I well understood that in the person of her heroine, Marie Corelli was pronouncing the verdict of the virtuous middle-class on the doings of their profligate social superiors. Marie Corelli was a bad writer, according to the critics, but she was highly readable, which is probably why I remember those books to this day.

As my behaviour on these visits suggests, I was in the habit of picking up and reading any book that I found lying around. Whether young or old, at home or abroad, one of the first things I would do on finding myself in a new place was to see what books were there for me to read during my visit. One of the most memorable of such finds took place more than sixty years ago. I was in South India with a friend. We were wandering ascetics, having gone forth from home into the homeless life as the Buddha had done many centuries earlier. We had no identity papers, no possessions other than the *gerua*-dyed robes we wore and, in my case, a copy of the *Dhammapada*. We went barefoot, walking from place to place and relying for

our food on the generosity of the people through whose villages we passed. We were Outsiders. We were in the world, but not of it, at least so far as externals went. We were celibate, had no family, and no worldly occupation. The occasion I am recalling finds my friend and me, footsore and weary, approaching an unpretentious building, being warmly welcomed, given food, and finally being settled in a bungalow nearby. We were in Anandashram, the abode of Swami Ramdas, and we stayed there for six weeks. We spent much of our time in meditation, but every now and then we went to the Bhajan Hall where we listened to the devotional songs and talked with Swami Ramdas. It was not long before we discovered that the ashram possessed a library, or rather a small, very miscellaneous collection of religious books. Among them, to my surprise and delight, was Suzuki's translation of *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*. I had seen a version of it before, but I had not read it, and I therefore proceeded to copy it out into my rather fat notebook. This notebook I still have, and together with twenty-six other items it formed part of the Nine Decade Exhibition that was held in connection with my ninetieth birthday celebrations.

From Anandashram my friend and I travelled to the ashram of the celebrated Ramana Maharshi. We stayed there for six weeks, occupying a cave at the foot of Mount Arunachala, the mountain of light. Every few days we would pay a visit to the ashram in order to have *darshan* of the Maharshi. One night I had a vision of Amitābha, the red Buddha, the Buddha of the West. I took the vision to mean that having spent two years as a freelance wandering ascetic I should now seek ordination as a *bhikkhu*. Not long afterwards, therefore, my friend and I were given the lower or *sāmaṇera* ordination by a senior Burmese monk, and more than a year later, my friend having left for Ceylon, I received the higher or *bhikkhu* ordination from a sangha consisting of monks from Burma, Ceylon, India, and Nepal. The Buddha had reminded his *bhikkhu* disciples that upon entering the sangha they left behind them their former names and social identities and henceforth were reckoned simply as Sons of the Buddha, but I soon found that in modern times this was not always the case. A Sinhalese monk for example, was often Sinhalese first and a *bhikkhu* afterwards. Moreover, many monks were keenly interested in politics, even to the extent of supporting one political party rather than another, and some years later this involvement of monks in politics culminated in a Prime Minister of Ceylon being assassinated by a Sinhalese *bhikkhu*. Far from being Outsiders, as the Buddha and his *bhikkhu* disciples were, such political monks were as much Insiders as were the laity.

But it is time I went into reverse and reconnected with the war years. Since I suffered from valvular disease of the heart, and was still supposed not to run or even to walk quickly, I had assumed that I was quite unfit for military service. At my Medical Board, however, I was classed as B2, while the cardiologist to whom I was referred, at my request, told me that there was nothing wrong with my heart. Thus, from being an Outsider who could not even run quickly I was transformed, overnight, into an Insider who, with two or three dozen other men, was drilled, went on route marches, and learned to handle a variety of lethal weapons. In *The Rainbow Road* the chapter in which I describe my early days in the army is headed 'The Misfit'. In a sense we were all misfits, having been plunged into the army from various walks of life and at various ages from eighteen to forty-five. Though I did not realize it at the time we were comparatively lucky. We were lucky because on the strength of our knowledge of Morse code we had been posted to a semi-secret unit of the Royal Corps of

Signals, and had to undergo only the most basic military training. Even so, after four or five months it became evident that the authorities wanted to get us off military training and into full-time technical training as quickly as possible. No more drill, no more guard duty, and no more route marches, and we were given as many weekend passes as we wanted!

In this more civilized atmosphere tensions relaxed, and we were able to take up the thread of interests that we had had to drop on entering the army. In my own case I had more time for walks in the countryside and for reading and writing poetry. Nor was this all. Living at close quarters with other men, especially those of my own age, I became more aware than ever that I was an Outsider. I was not an Outsider because I loved the poetry of Robert Herrick, or was exhilarated by Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, or even because I regarded myself as a Buddhist. I was an Outsider for deeper and darker reasons. I was an Outsider because I was sexually attracted to men, not to women, and I had been aware of this since the age of fourteen.

In subsequent years, thanks to my wide reading, I had become aware that there were, and always had been, men like me, among them being some of the brightest names in poetry, literature, music, and the visual arts. By the time I entered the army, therefore, I knew just where I stood, sexually speaking. I also knew what the majority of people thought of sexuality such as mine. Homosexuality was unnatural. It was wicked, sinful, and perverse and a homosexual was a moral leper. This was not the worst. In my own country, as in other civilized countries, any kind of homosexual activity was a criminal offence, and there were countries in which it was punishable by death. It therefore behoved me to be very careful what I did or said, or even how I looked at other men. This was not without its consequences for my emotional life. Keeping my feelings to myself became a habit, especially when those feelings were very strong and directed to another man. Many years were to pass before I was able to give expression to such feelings even to a limited extent.

Though it was on account of my particular type of sexuality that I was an Outsider, one could be an Outsider for all sorts of other reasons, as Colin Wilson made clear. One could be an Outsider for reasons that were political, or religious, or cultural, or commercial, or for ones that were purely social. Whatever the reason, there were advantages as well as disadvantages to being an Outsider, as I had discovered when at school. One advantage was that as an Outsider one had a sharper sense of separation from the group to which one belonged. It gave one a heightened awareness of one's individuality and, therefore, of the possibility of a development that went beyond group values to the higher values of philosophy, religion, and the arts. Another advantage was that as an Outsider one was unusually sensitive to the subliminal signals coming from other people. In certain situations, the ability to read those signals might be a matter of life or death. A political dissident living under a totalitarian regime, or a homosexual living in a country where homosexuality was a criminal or even capital offence, needed to be constantly on the alert. Like some animals he would have to sleep with one eye open. Any talk of the advantages of being an Outsider is likely to have a hollow sound in the ears of one who is himself suffering from being an Outsider. Such suffering is of two kinds, external and internal. The former includes ostracism, torture, imprisonment, and death. The latter occurs when the Outsider introjects the values of the group and condemns himself because the group condemns him. If the

Outsider is homosexual he will feel shame and guilt on account of his sexuality. He may even try to deny it. In extreme cases he may commit suicide. As George V famously said, 'I thought men like that shot themselves.'

Again I must go into reverse and reconnect with my time in India as a Buddhist monk. In 1956, 400,000 men and women renounced Hinduism and embraced Buddhism under the leadership of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar. I was then living in Kalimpong, a small town in the foothills of the eastern Himalayas, and it was not long before I became involved in the movement of mass conversion that had been thus inaugurated. The converts were ex-Untouchables. They were Outsiders in that they were outside the Hindu caste system and were systematically treated in a humiliating and degrading manner by the caste Hindu majority. I met Dr Ambedkar several times, and after his untimely death spent much of my time travelling among the new Buddhists and teaching them the fundamentals of the Dhamma. This I did for seven or eight years, in this way winning their confidence so that even after my departure for England in 1964 they did not forget me. Some of my non-Buddhist friends wondered how I could have so much influence with the new Buddhists. I was not an Indian. I was British, and as such an Outsider, a mere *mleccha* or barbarian. To this I replied that I was indeed an Outsider, not only because I was not a citizen of India but because I was a Buddhist monk, there being very few *bhikkhus* in India at that time. It was because I was an Outsider that the new Buddhists trusted me. Like them, I was outside the Hindu caste system. We were Outsiders together.

In 1962 I was invited by the English Sangha Trust to spend six months in England. As I wanted to finish the book on which I was working, and had moreover undertaken a nine-month tour among the new Buddhists, it was not until 1964 that I was able to leave India. At that time there were two Buddhist organizations in London, both of them quite small. There was the Buddhist Society of London and there was the English Sangha Association, the trustees of which had invited me to make the visit. Membership of the Buddhist Society was open to all. One did not even have to be a Buddhist to be a member, or even a practising Buddhist if one happened to be Buddhist at all. Membership of the English Sangha Association, on the other hand, was open only to those who wanted to see a branch of the Buddhist monastic order established in England and who were committed to its support when established. The Buddhist Society, which had originally been the Buddhist Lodge of the Theosophical Society, functioned as a common platform for different forms of Buddhism, though the dominant form was a Zen deriving mainly from the writings of D. T. Suzuki. Committed as it was to the establishment of an indigenous monastic order, the English Sangha Association naturally favoured Theravāda Buddhism. As I soon discovered, the four or five hundred English Buddhists were more or less evenly divided between the Society and the Association, though a handful belonged to both. Though I was based at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, which belonged to the English Sangha Trust, I gave lectures and led meditation classes for the members of both the Association and the Society. In this way I sought to bring the two Buddhist organizations together. This did not please everybody, and eventually I saw that a new form of Buddhism was needed in England, perhaps in the West. As was not the case with the Society, all the members of this new form of Buddhism would be committed Buddhists, though unlike the Association they would not be committed to any one form of Buddhism. Two years later, after I had paid a brief farewell

visit to India, this new Buddhist movement came into existence in London as the Friends of the Western Sangha. Yet it did not emerge fully-formed all at once, like Pallas Athena from the head of Zeus. It was not a blueprint but a seed, and like a seed it needed time for its development

This development has now been going on for forty-eight years and it will continue to develop and expand after my death. To begin with I gave all the talks, led all the meditation classes and country retreats, and conducted all the ordinations within the Triratna Buddhist Order, as the Western Buddhist Order eventually became. Soon the seed was quite a tree, a tree with several big branches, a number of twigs and innumerable leaves. So many twigs and leaves were there that sometimes it became difficult for people to see the structure of the tree. I therefore started speaking in terms of the Six Distinctive Emphases of the Triratna Buddhist Order and Community and gave more than one talk on them. This is not the place for me to summarize those talks. I do, however, remember an interesting coincidence. The Triratna Buddhist Community was founded in 1967, membership being open to all, including homosexuals. It so happened that it was the same year, 1967, that homosexual acts between consenting adult men in private were decriminalized in England and Wales. A homosexual was no longer a complete Outsider, at least officially. When I started speaking in terms of the Six Distinctive Emphases of Triratna, senior members of the Order were already running most Triratna activities, and before many years had passed they were running them all.

At the time of writing I am living at Adhithana. It is autumn, the poet's 'season of mists and mellow fruitfulness', and there have been mists enough and much mellow fruitfulness in the form of the loads of apples that have been carted away from the neighbouring orchards. Though I have visitors, it is a long time since I paid any visits, and a long time, therefore, since I have had the experience of picking up a book that happened to be lying around and reading it on the spot. This does not mean that from time to time I do not come across a book of which I have never heard but on which I am willing to spend a few hours. I am a member of Calibre and of the Royal National Institute for the Blind, both of which supply talking books to blind and partially-sighted people. When I joined those organizations I asked for works on religion and on philosophy, but since hardly any works on these subjects were available I changed to biography and classic fiction. Thus it was that I came to be listening to novels by Anthony Trollope, and finding in two of them characters that were reminiscent of Colin Wilson's concept of the Outsider. Ferdinand Lopez, in *The Prime Minister*, is definitely an Outsider, being of Portuguese descent, probably Jewish, and not a gentleman in the English sense of the term. Having neither profession nor a regular income he speculates on the commodity market and the reader is not surprised that eventually his speculations fail and he commits suicide. Dr Thorne, the eponymous hero of the novel of the same name, is an Outsider in the eyes of other doctors, for he is his own apothecary. His niece Mary, who lives with him, is an Outsider of another kind, for she happens to be illegitimate. When Mary unexpectedly inherits a fortune the titled lady who has treated Mary with great cruelty and done her best to keep her away from her son is now happy to welcome her as a daughter-in-law despite her illegitimacy. Thus from being an Outsider Mary, overnight, becomes an Insider, a not unusual development where money is concerned.

Whether listening to Trollope or any other novelists I listen in the living room of the Ugyen Annexe where I have now lived for more than two and a half years with Paramartha. I usually listen sitting in a comfortable armchair that belonged to my mother and which I inherited when she died twenty-five years ago. All around me are mementos and memorabilia of my long and eventful life. There are paintings and photographs, images and artefacts, gifts from groups and gifts from individuals. Among the last are things that Paramartha has given me over the years. They include a wall plate from Morocco, a silver statuette of Milarepa, and a replica of an ancient Greek vase depicting Hercules. As I look at them or handle them I think of my friend and remember the times we have spent together, whether on retreat at Guhyaloka, or travelling, or studying the Dharma together in the conservatory here at the Annexe. As I write these words Paramartha is in New Zealand, looking after his mother who has cancer. He left Adhithana more than two months ago, and does not know how long he will be away. We exchange emails every week and talk on the phone. I have been sending him my recent writings, and I will send this one too, as soon as I have a title for it.

## **7 Remembering Alaya**

In my bedroom in the Ugyen Annexe there hangs a framed print of Dr Johnson, one of my five literary heroes. The print was a birthday present from Alaya. I do not remember which birthday this was, but I do remember Alaya giving me the print at Norwich Buddhist Centre in All Saint's Green, which I was then visiting. Alaya had framed the print himself, for he was a carpenter and had been a member of the team that created Sukhavati, our centre in Bethnal Green.<sup>2</sup> Though I did not have many meetings with Alaya over the years, three of them stand out. The first was when we attended a retreat held at Court Lodge, the home of Subhuti's parents. I particularly remember his mass of ginger hair, which made a pleasing contrast with his dead white skin. Our second meeting took place when I visited him when he was living as a member of a kind of hippy commune. I used to go past the commune, which was situated not far from the road, whenever I drove from London to Padmaloka. It stood opposite a pub called, I think, the Angel (connoisseurs of Norfolk pubs will correct me if I am wrong). I remember Alaya proudly showing me the communal earth closet, where he said he often enjoyed friendly chats with other members of the commune. Our last meeting took place in Norwich, at his home, when I spent a pleasant evening with him, his wife, Ratnamala, and their son, Sam. He had long been suffering from epilepsy but was at that time in a reasonable state of health. Subsequent bulletins about his health made it clear that his condition was deteriorating and I was not surprised when I heard that he was in hospital. His death at fifty-five came as rather a shock, and my heart goes out to Ratnamala and Sam. He was a friendly person, fun-loving but serious, and he was concerned to keep up his connections with the Order. His practice was the Green Tārā *sādhana*, which I remember giving him. May she protect him on his way!

## **8 What Might Have Been**

‘What do you want to be when you grow up?’ I used to be asked when I was thirteen or fourteen. Sometimes it would be ‘What do you want to do when you grow up?’ Although I remember being asked these questions I cannot remember who asked them. I never thought about what I would be or do when I left school and went out into the world. What I did think about was what I wanted to do at the time. I wanted to write, especially to write poetry, and I wanted to draw and paint, as well as to read as much as I could about literature and the arts. At the time of which I am speaking I spent more time painting than writing. I liked to paint pictures of historical figures such as Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth, Catherine de' Medici and Marie Antoinette. I particularly liked painting pictures of women, for depicting their long, flowing draperies, with all their folds and creases, gave me a keen aesthetic pleasure. It also meant that I did not have to depict their bodies, especially their legs, which at this time was beyond my skill. The fact that I was spending much of my free time painting could hardly escape the notice of those around me, especially my parents and my sister and other members of the family. It was well known that Dennis painted and that he was, perhaps, going to be an artist when he grew up. There was even some talk about the possibility of my going to art school. But it was not my ambition to be an artist. I just wanted to paint and draw. But although it was well known that Dennis painted it was not so well known that he also wrote poetry. Indeed it was known only to the girl next door, a girl of my own age to whom I showed my first poems. ‘They are very good,’ she said. Despite this appreciation, I did not show her any more of my poems, nor did I show them to anyone else. It was as though writing, unlike painting, was something personal and private and it was some time before I showed anyone else anything that I had written. This does not mean that I wrote only for myself. I wrote for an audience, or at least for a potential one, but that audience did not include anyone around me. Eventually, when I was seventeen, it came to include Claire Cameron, editor of the *Middle Way*, who published not only a few of my poems but also my first articles on Buddhism. I was eighteen when these appeared.

By this time Britain had been at war with Nazi Germany for four years. During those years I had been evacuated, had worked for a year in a coal merchant's office, and for two years had been a clerical assistant in the LCC's Public Health Department at County Hall. Now I was conscripted into the army. I had not expected to be conscripted. I had assumed that with my long history of valvular disease of the heart I would be considered unfit for military service. This proved not to be the case and I have sometimes wondered how my life would have developed if I had not been conscripted at eighteen, had not experienced life in the army, had not been posted to India, had not become a Buddhist monk, had not written *A Survey of Buddhism*, and had not become the disciple of Tibetan lamas, all of which had followed from the simple fact of having been found fit for military service. Thus the fact that I had been found fit for military service had led to my having for the next twenty years a life very different from what I would otherwise have had.

But what would that other life have been like? Where would I have lived? What would I have done? I would not have lived at home, for I had no home, my parents having separated a year or so earlier. Perhaps I would have lived with my grandmother, occupying the room that Uncle Charles had occupied before his marriage. Probably I would have continued to be a clerical assistant at County Hall, though I would not have known how long my job would



last. I was no more than a temporary clerical assistant, having been recruited during the war, and would probably have been replaced sooner or later by someone returning from having served his country in the armed forces. In some respects, therefore, my life would have been an uncertain one, even a precarious one. Not that it would have been uncertain in all respects. I would have kept on writing whatever the circumstances. I would have continued to write for the *Middle Way* and would have kept up my friendships with Clare Cameron and Arnold Price, the translator of the *Diamond Sutra*. I would also have attended lectures and meditation classes at the Buddhist Society's rooms above a tea shop in Great Russell Street, as I had been doing for some time, and I am sure that before long I would have been giving lectures there myself. I may even have succeeded Clare Cameron as editor of the *Middle Way*.

Not that all my activities would have revolved around the Buddhist Society. I would have sent off articles and poems to the editors of literary magazines, some of whom might have paid their contributors. Very likely I would have joined the PEN Club and met other writers, and I would certainly have continued to patronize the theatre and cinema, as well as to frequent museums and art galleries. Within ten or twelve years of my rejection by the army I would, I think, have published a slim volume of poems, have collected my Buddhist articles into a book, and have produced a substantial work on Buddhism. It would not have been *A Survey of Buddhism*, of course, but it would have been very much like it, for whether in England or in India, my understanding of the Buddha's Dharma would have developed along similar lines. Even if that crowning work had not been well received I would surely have written more books and would have planned to write even more. The truth is that throughout my life there have always been books that I planned to write but which, for one reason or another, I never got round to writing.

Thus during those ten or twelve years I may well have had a moderately successful career as a writer, at least as a writer of books and articles on Buddhism. But what would my emotional and spiritual life have been like? Some of it would have found expression in my poetry, but there would have been much going on that would have found no expression at all. This would have been especially the case with my sexual feelings, which, being a young man's feelings, would have been very strong. What, then, would I have done? I find it difficult to say. Perhaps I would have acted upon those feelings, perhaps not. In any case I would have been faced by a serious problem for my sexual feelings were directed towards other men and in England acting upon such feelings was a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment. Had I simply repressed my feelings I may not have fallen foul of the law, but my whole sexual and emotional life would have been stultified. On the other hand, had I ventured to act upon them, even to a limited extent, I would have had to do so furtively, even secretly, with the consciousness that I was not only breaking the law but leading a double life. I would have been always anxious, afraid of being found out, and unable to be fully open even with those with whom I broke the law. But perhaps eventually I would have become careless, would have knowingly taken risks, or would have trusted the wrong person, with the result that one day I would have been caught and exposed, thus disgracing my family, alienating my friends, and losing whatever standing I then had in the world. Like others in the same position I would have had to decide between two alternatives. I would have had to decide between suicide and prison. But here my imagination falters and I return

with relief from the possible fate of my hypothetical self to the subject of my unwritten books.

Some of these unwritten books were to have formed part of a series called 'The Heritage of Buddhism'. There were to have been five volumes in all, but only *The Three Jewels* and *The Eternal Legacy*, the first and second volumes in the series, were actually written. Both were written in Kalimpong in the foothills of the eastern Himalayas where I was living at the time. Volume 4, on 'Meditation in the Three Yānas', and volume 5 on 'Forms and Functions of Buddhist Art' were never written. Of the 'Patterns of Development in Buddhism', the third volume in the series, I was able to write only the first three sections, also written in Kalimpong. All these volumes – the written, the unwritten, and the partly written – were the result of my having been invited to contribute the articles on Buddhism to the *Oriya Encyclopaedia*, one of the fourteen regional language encyclopaedias then being sponsored by the Government of India. I was more than happy to write the articles, and set to work on them immediately, putting aside *The Rainbow Road*, on which I had been working for some time. I wrote in the morning after breakfast and carried on until lunchtime. If I grew stiff, or if I came up against a doctrinal or a literary difficulty, I left my desk and walked up and down the veranda until the difficulty had been resolved. Within two years I had written, despite interruptions, up to 100,000 words, which was far more than the 14,000 for which I had been asked. Partly because my subject was Buddhism, and partly because the act of writing was so pleasurable, I enjoyed writing them and was sorry when I had to stop. The reason for my having to stop was that I had been invited to write the article on Buddhism for the new edition of the OUP's *The Legacy of India* and the article was needed at once. By the time I had written this article it was 1964 and high time I fulfilled my promise to the English Sangha Trust, namely, that I would spend six months in England. I was never able resume my work on the articles for the Oriya Encyclopaedia and 'The Heritage of Buddhism' therefore remains incomplete. *The Three Jewels* was eventually published by Rider in 1967 and *The Eternal Legacy* by Tharpa in 1985.

One of my favourite unwritten books was planned but unwritten not in India but in England, not in the foothills of the eastern Himalayas but amid the flat landscape of Norfolk. I was then living at Padmaloka, a men's community on the outskirts of the village of Surlingham, some seven miles from Norwich. During my time there I naturally developed an interest in the area, especially as I was living only twenty miles from the village of Besthorpe, near Attleborough, where my paternal grandmother had been born and where my father had spent much of his childhood. Norfolk was one of the bigger English counties and in the Middle Ages Norwich was second in importance only to London as was testified by its forty-odd churches, including its twelfth-century cathedral. Where there is history there will be heroes and heroines, and as I thought about the ones who belonged to Norfolk, either by birth or domicile, five names not only stood out for me but seemed to form a constellation. These five I came to think of as my Five Norfolk Worthies, and before long I was planning a book about them. The five were Julian of Norwich, Sir Thomas Browne, Thomas Paine, Lord Nelson, and Edith Cavell. There was to be a chapter on each of them and these chapters would go to make a small book. Though the plan was clear enough in my mind, and though I liked thinking about my five worthies, my life at Padmaloka was a busy one and I was

unable to write even a word about any of them. *Five Norfolk Worthies* thus became one of my unwritten books.

Though I never wrote about my five Norfolk worthies I did not forget them, and they continued to haunt the fringes of my consciousness. In the case of Julian of Norwich (1342–1416) I was able, during my stay at Padmaloka, to visit the cell where she had spent the greater part of her life. The cell was built up against the wall of the Church of St Julian in Norwich and it had two windows, one opening into the church, so that Julian could hear mass, the other opening onto the street, so that she could communicate with the people who came to her. I saw the place at the invitation of a friend. This friend belonged to a meditation group that met there regularly and he once invited me to join them. Seven or eight people were gathered there, including my friend. I do not know what kind of meditation they practised, but the atmosphere was very peaceful and I enjoyed my visit. Years later I learned that the original cell had been destroyed by a German bomb and that the one I had seen was a reconstruction. I had heard of Julian of Norwich long before my time at Padmaloka and had read a popular edition of her book, *Revelations of Divine Love*. In this book, the first English book to be written by a woman, Julian not only describes her sixteen visions of Jesus Christ but also comments on them at some length as though she was trying to understand their meaning. Had I written my chapter on her I would no doubt have read this work again and may well have compared it with the writings of other Christian mystics. I may also have thought it necessary to discuss the question of whether the mystical experience was entirely subjective or whether the mystic really did encounter a higher trans-personal reality.

Like Julian, Sir Thomas Browne (1605–1682) had a close connection with Norwich, but there the resemblance between them ends. She was an anchoress and a mystic, he a doctor, a scholar, an antiquarian, and a busy professional man. Above all he was the author of *Religio Medici*, a work remarkable for its beautiful, baroque style. I came across it when I was fourteen and was so fascinated by its style that I strove to imitate it in an essay of my own. So far as I remember, Sir Thomas Browne was the only writer whose style I ever wanted to imitate. Had my chapter about him been written, I would have discussed the question of literary style in detail and no doubt would have had something to say about the immense variety of English prose styles. Sir Thomas Browne lived through the Civil War, in which he took the Royalist side, for which he was knighted by Charles II when the king visited Norwich after the Restoration. He lies buried in the Church of St Peter Mancroft in Norwich.

Julian of Norwich is known only to students of mysticism, and Sir Thomas Browne is known mainly to lovers of English literature, but Thomas Paine (1737–1809) is much more widely known. He was involved in both the American and the French Revolutions and his *The Rights of Man* is a classic of political literature. I do not find him a sympathetic character and had I written about him I would probably have said little about his life and much more about the whole question of ‘rights’. As long ago as 1951 I wrote an article on ‘Rights and Duties’ in which I argued that the two were, in fact, not only complementary but inseparable, and that the emphasis should be on duties rather than rights. As I then put it, ‘But just as, in the case of a walking-stick, although its two ends are inseparable, so that one

is unthinkable without the other, nevertheless it is the handle of the stick that must be grasped, not the tip, so in human relationships it is duties that must be performed, rather than rights demanded, even though the two in fact are inseparable so that the one necessarily follows from the other'. Since I wrote those rather uncompromising lines there has been in many parts of the world, including Britain, a disturbing change. Rights and duties are no longer seen as being inseparable and complementary. Rights are separated from duties, so that duties come to be neglected, and social and political discourse is dominated by the concept of rights. Rights are of many kinds and the number seems to be constantly on the increase. There can also be a conflict between different rights, as when the mother's right to do what she pleases with her own body conflicts with the right of the foetus to live. The confusion that has been generated by the one-sided emphasis on rights can be resolved by a greater emphasis on duties. The Buddha spoke of duties, not of rights. According to him duties are complementary, parents have duties towards their children, and children have duties towards their parents, and so on through the whole gamut of human relationships. Members of a Buddhist community will therefore think in terms of duties rather than in terms of rights and act accordingly. They will take hold of the right end of the stick. In Thomas Paine's time, in both England and France, the emphasis was on duties rather than rights, especially where the common people were concerned. It is therefore understandable that throughout his career Thomas Paine should have preached the gospel of human rights. His statue stands in the marketplace of Thetford where he was born.

Lord Nelson (1758–1805) belongs not just to history but to legend. Perhaps he belongs more to legend than to history, at least in the collective memory of his fellow countrymen. The principal facts of his life were known to me from an early age, but it was the legend that appealed to me, and had I written about Nelson it was probably on the legend that I would have dwelt. I would perhaps have begun by emphasizing the fact that his was an extremely attractive personality, and that as admiral he was as popular with his subordinates as he was unpopular with some of his superiors in the service. He did not hesitate to disobey orders, as when he put his telescope to his blind eye when he did not wish to see a signal with whose orders he disagreed. His relationship with Lady Hamilton, whom he met in the romantic setting of Naples, is very much part of the legend. He is as much the Hero as Lover as he is the Hero as Victor, and although the legend speaks of one great love, the victories were many. Nelson's greatest victory was at Trafalgar when he destroyed Napoleon's Franco-Spanish fleet and established Britain's naval supremacy. The victory cost him his life. He was struck down by a bullet from a marksman stationed in the rigging of a French ship and died in the arms of his faithful Hardy. His last words were, 'Thank God I have done my duty.' Trafalgar Square and Nelson's Column were familiar sights from my boyhood, serving to remind me of the man and his legend. Had I, in fact, written about him, I think I would have had something to say about his connection with the sea. The land for which he gave his life is an island, as the BBC's shipping forecast reminds us every Saturday evening. One is never more than seventy miles from the sea and it has been said that the sea is in an Englishman's blood. I have not spent much time at sea and sometimes wish I could have spent more, especially as I have happy memories of short trips by ferry. One of these was from Harwich to Götheburg. It was a brilliantly sunny day and the sea, calm as a lake, reflected the cloudless cerulean sky. Another trip took me from Brindisi to Igoumenitsa. As I have written elsewhere, 'It was a fine, clear morning, the sea could not have been more

calm, and we were sailing between the mainland and some four or five small, widely separated islands. Despite the muffled hum of the ship's engines, and the occasional muffled shout coming from the swimming pool, there was a breathless hush in the air, and as I gazed out over the dark blue waters it was as though time stood still, as though nothing had changed, and that I was seeing what Homer – had he not been blind – might have seen three thousand years ago.'

Edith Cavell (born 1865) was executed by a German firing squad on 12 October 1915. Her crime was that she had helped Allied prisoners-of-war and others to escape from occupied Belgium to Holland. I have often wondered what were the feelings of those young German soldiers as they shot a defenceless woman. They were, of course, obeying orders, and had they done otherwise out of pity for their victim they would in all likelihood have been court-martialled themselves and been shot by a firing squad of their own comrades. Edith Cavell was born in the village of Swardeston, where her father was vicar, and had her schooling in nearby Norwich. After five years as a governess, she trained as a nurse and worked in hospitals in different parts of England, including London. In 1907 she became matron of a newly established nursing school in Brussels and a pioneer of modern nursing in Belgium. When Germany occupied Belgium, Edith Cavell's clinic and nursing school were taken over by the Red Cross and she continued working as a nurse. This brought her into contact with wounded Allied soldiers and it was for helping many of these escape that she was sentenced to death by the German military. Her last words were, 'Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone.' These words are inscribed on the pedestal of her statue in St Martins, near Trafalgar Square. I have often passed that statue and have wondered how many of the tourists and other passers-by know her story. Had I written about her, I would have had quite a lot to say about those famous last words, which reminds me of *Dhammapada* verse 5: 'Not by hatred (*vera*) are hatreds (*verani*) pacified. They are pacified by love (*avera*).' The remains of Edith Cavell were finally buried in the grounds of Norwich Cathedral.

As I think of my Five Norfolk Worthies, and try to imagine what I might have written about them, I regret that the book of which they were to be the subject should be one of my unwritten books. Other books that were planned but not written included one on the relationship between Neoplatonism and Buddhism. Neoplatonism had fascinated me since my teens, when I had dipped into the *Enneads* and read Dean Inge's *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, to both of which I returned years later. Indeed, I had a small library of works on Neoplatonism and related subjects. At the centre of my book there would probably have been a comparison between the three hypostases of Neoplatonism and the three *svabhāvas* of Yogācāra Buddhism. I had also very much wanted to write a biography of the Buddha. Not that I planned it in any detail but from time to time I thought about it quite a lot. In particular I wanted to bring together the historical Buddha and the legendary or archetypal Buddha in such a way that the reader would see and feel them as the mundane and transcendental aspects of a single undivided personality. My approach would have been both philosophical and devotional. Another unwritten book was my autobiography. Friends might protest that I had in fact already written my autobiography, and written it not in one volume, but many. This is to confuse memoirs and autobiography. As the word itself suggests, memoirs are what one remembers of one's life as one looks back on it. Some events and

experiences will be remembered more clearly than others, and some may not be remembered at all. Thus in memoirs there will inevitably be gaps. Moreover, one may mis-remember certain events and experiences and one's account of them may differ widely from that of others who were present at the time and who have different memories. An autobiography, on the other hand, is an auto-biography. It is an account of one's life by oneself written in the first person, and it draws not only on one's own memories, but on letters, diaries, and other documents. It also contextualizes one's life with regard to other people and to the public events of one's time. In my own case, for example, I have described in my memoirs my arrival in India in 1944 without reference to the political situation that existed there at the time. In my autobiography, had I written it, I would have given an account of that situation and perhaps of my own reaction to it. Be that as it may, I mourned my unwritten autobiography as I mourned all my unwritten books. It is too late in life for me to think of writing any of them now and they must remain unwritten for ever.

Though my autobiography must remain unwritten, I can at least look back over my life and reflect upon its vicissitudes. I can reflect on the establishing of a new Buddhist movement in London, on my work among the ex-Untouchable Buddhists of India, on the founding of the Triyana Vardhana Vihara in Kalimpong, on my ordination as a *bhikkhu*, on my life as a freelance wandering ascetic, on my life in the army, and so on back to the time when, as a teenager, all I wanted to do was to write, especially to write poetry, as well as to draw and paint, and to read widely. I did not want to be or do anything when I grew up, nor have I wanted to 'be' or 'do' anything since.

## **9 The Young Man in the Hut**

On my reaching the years of puberty some of my female relations started teasing me about the sort of woman I would marry when I grew up. One of my mother's sisters, in particular, used to speculate in this way when we met. 'You will marry a short, fat little woman,' she would tell me, 'with short, fat little legs.' I have no idea why my aunt was so sure that I would marry a short and fat woman rather than a tall and thin one. At that time of life I had no thought of marrying anyone of whatever size and shape, and I may have told my aunt as much. Strange to say, even when I was very young I used to tell people I would never marry, even though I did not know what marriage meant. Many years later I was reminded of my aunt's prediction when I read about the so-called Palaeolithic Venus. This was the name given by archaeologists to the 150 or more female figurines of various sizes that have been discovered in many parts of the world. Most of them belong to the period 24–19,000 BCE. The typical Palaeolithic Venus was short and fat. She had exaggeratedly large hips, breasts and vulva, but her head was small and featureless and her legs tapered downwards. Opinions differ as to the significance of these figurines. According to some archaeologists they were amulets, while others believe that their significance was religious and that they had a place in ritual. Whatever the truth may be, it is evident that for the men (and perhaps for the women) who fashioned them women were essentially producers of children. The figurines were fertility symbols, and fertility was important in ensuring the survival of the group.

Centuries pass, hundreds of centuries pass. By the time of the Italian Renaissance woman is still seen as being essentially the producer of children, but there have been changes. Her primary and secondary sexual characteristics are now less exaggerated, and her body has grown a head, so to speak, and her face wears an expression. The Venus depicted in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* is very different from her Palaeolithic ancestress. I first encountered the famous painting in the pages of the *Children's Encyclopaedia*, and years later I had the privilege of seeing the original in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. It was a dark December evening and the gallery was almost deserted, so that I was able to sit in front of the painting for as long as I wished. The goddess is standing on a huge shell, and her pearl-white body is naked. To the left two wind-gods with distended cheeks are blowing her towards her island home. With her right hand she covers her right breast while with her left she covers her vulva with the end of her blonde tresses. Her expression is one of wonder and delight. She is delighted to have escaped from the depths, delighted to look out on the world with its calm sea and tranquil sky. On the right a handmaid hastens forward holding a rich garment with which she is about to clothe the goddess. On the far right, just behind the handmaid rise three leafy trees.

Besides depicting Venus and other pagan deities, Botticelli also painted the Virgin Mary, and although her features are sometimes those of the goddess, again there are changes. Whereas his Venus is naked, save for the half-concealed breasts and vulva, in his *Madonna of the Magnificat* the Virgin is completely draped. Here woman is not only emancipated from her sexuality but is seen as the embodiment of ideal beauty. Her expression, though, is very different from that of the goddess of the *Birth of Venus*. The latter is one of wonder and delight, whereas that of the Virgin Mary in the *Madonna of the Magnificat* is expressive of submission to the will of God. Perhaps it is only Leonardo Da Vinci who, among the artists of his day, is able to depict woman, in the person of the Virgin Mary, as a spiritual being. He does this in the *Virgin of the Rocks*, as well in his drawing of *The Virgin with St Anne* in the National Gallery in London. But Mary is Mother as well as Virgin, and in the works of Velázquez, Murillo, and El Greco, a century later, she breaks free of her child, so to speak, and is depicted in her own right. She is now a goddess as much as Venus ever was and her name is the Immaculate Conception. I painted her as such when I was thirteen or fourteen, depicting her standing on the crescent moon and wearing a white inner robe and a blue outer one. She has long black hair and her arms are crossed on her breasts. Above her head and to her left and right are small red roses. These were my own additions to the traditional depictions of her. Years later I noticed that in the *Birth of Venus* a few small red roses fall through the air.

Where there is a Palaeolithic Venus one might have expected to find a Palaeolithic Apollo. So far as I know, he has not been found and may never have existed. Something more interesting has been found. Three thousand years before Botticelli, sculptors in Ancient Greece created the Kouros, the so-called Archaic Apollo. The typical Kouros is a standing naked youth with broad shoulders and narrow hips and evident musculature. His arms hang down at his side and his face wears the famous archaic smile. He provides the pattern for an ideal of male beauty that culminates in the gods and athletes of the classical period, such as the *Apollo Belvedere* in the Vatican and the *Discobolos* in Athens. That model may be said to have persisted down to the present day. A man with narrow shoulders and broad hips would

be regarded as unnatural, as would a woman with broad shoulders and narrow hips. The breadth of a man's shoulders and the narrowness of his hips may, of course, be greatly exaggerated so as to make him look more masculine. An example of this is the Phantom in the American comic strip. Similarly the size of a woman's breasts and hips may be greatly exaggerated too, so as to make her look more feminine in the sense of being sexually more attractive, as in the notorious 'Page Three Girl'. For the ancient Greeks the male body was more beautiful than the female body. This was because of the greater harmony that existed between its different parts and because of its less obvious connection to its biological function. The genitals were never emphasized in the depiction of gods and athletes, though the satyrs, the companions of Dionysus, were sometimes endowed with enormous phalluses. For the Greeks beauty was not merely physical, but also mental. One might go as far as to say that their ideal was not just a healthy mind in a healthy body but a beautiful mind in a beautiful (male) body.

Not everyone will agree that the male body is more beautiful than the female body. The idea that the male body is more beautiful than the female body will come as a surprise to many men and most women. The reason for this is that beauty is commonly identified with sexual attractiveness and men find women beautiful because they find them sexually attractive. This is not to say that women have no share in beauty but that their beauty is in their face rather than in their body. Thus, if men have more beautiful bodies than women, women have more beautiful faces than men. But faces, whether of men or women, have expression, and the expression will depend on their mental and emotional state. The effect of a face that is formally beautiful can be entirely spoiled if its expression is one of hatred, or contempt, or greed. Conversely even a homely face is beautiful when it has an expression of sympathy, or understanding, or content. A striking example of the latter came within my experience many years ago, as I have related in *The Rainbow Road*. I was staying with a friend at Ramana Maharshi's ashram in South India. Happening to explore the area to the west of the ashram we came upon a wattle and daub gate and beyond it a tiny mud-walled hut, thatched with palm leaves. Opening the gate and crossing the tiny cow-dunged courtyard we quietly opened the door of the hut.

Inside was a single small room, completely bare, and inside the room, almost directly facing us, there sat, meditating, the most beautiful young man I had ever seen. Slim and fair-complexioned he sat there, with closed eyes, beautiful not only on account of his perfectly proportioned body, naked save for a small cloth but, even more so, on account of the beatific smile that irradiated his face. He was quite oblivious to our presence. Unable to take our eyes off him, we stood there for several minutes. Then, having closed the door behind us even more gently than we had opened it, we slowly made our way back to the Ashram.

The expression on the young man's face must have stayed with me, for some weeks later it resulted in the poem 'The Face of Silence' in which I changed the setting of my experience but not its nature. The last three verses were as follows:

O'er his still features breathed a calm  
I had not seen before.  
It drew me as some maiden's charm



A lover to her door.

The light he saw I could not see,  
And yet it seemed to glow  
Upon his face more beautifully  
Than sunlight on the snow.

At last I turned away, and blessed  
The womb that gave him birth,  
Knowing that there in truth was rest  
And peace for those on earth.

I have described the young man in the hut as beautiful even though in modern times men are hardly ever described as such. At most they are 'handsome' or 'good looking'. This is not to say that there are no exceptions. In the course of the last few months I have listened to talking books of some of Anthony Trollope's so-called political novels, and was surprised to find that he does not hesitate to describe some of his male characters as beautiful, and even to insist on the fact. One young man is actually compared to Apollo, and it was probably the *Apollo Belvedere* that Trollope had in mind. I have also come across an article by the journalist and author Jilly Cooper in which she interviews two footballers, one of whom was George Best, and candidly admits she was surprised to see how beautiful they were. Trollope and Jilly Cooper were speaking of physical beauty, but the young man in the hut was not only physically beautiful but spiritually beautiful, and he was spiritually beautiful on account of his expression. This does not mean that there are only two kinds of beauty, the physical and the spiritual. Beauty is of many kinds, and it has many degrees, for there is a hierarchy of beauty, just as there is a hierarchy of being and a hierarchy of knowledge. Plotinus gives us a glimpse of this hierarchy in his tractate 'On Beauty' in the *Enneads*: 'Beauty is mostly in sight, but it is to be found too in things we hear, in combinations of words and also in music, and in all music [not only in songs]; for tunes and rhythms are certainly beautiful: and for those who are advancing upwards from sense-perception ways of life and actions and characters and intellectual activities are beautiful, and there is the beauty of virtue. If there is any beauty prior to these, it itself will reveal it.'

But what *is* beauty? There are numerous definitions, but I have always liked that of St Thomas Aquinas, according to whom beauty is that which, when seen (or heard), delights, and that in which we take pleasure, or which we enjoy, or in which we delight, we will love. Thus there is a connection between beauty and love, the latter being our natural response to the former, and just as there are different degrees of beauty there will be different degrees of love. Where there is physical beauty, heavenly beauty, and spiritual beauty there will be, corresponding to these, earthly love, heavenly love, and spiritual love. Having seen heavenly beauty we may well look down upon earthly beauty, and so on, and there is a story in the Buddhist scriptures that illustrates this point. A young man named Sundarananda, or Handsome Nanda, is in love with a beautiful Sakya maiden with long hair. The Buddha happens to come for alms, and his bowl having been filled he hands it to Sundarananda and tells him to follow him back to the vihara. This the young man does rather unwillingly, all the time looking back over his shoulder to the maiden he has left behind. On their arrival at

the vihara the Buddha directs Śāriputra and Mahamaudgalyāyana to ordain Nanda and the young man suffers himself to be made a monk. Though now a monk, he is unable to forget the Sakya maiden and finds it impossible to meditate. Knowing this, the Buddha by his magic power takes Sundarananda up to a higher, heavenly world and shows him the nymphs who live there. The nymphs are of extraordinary beauty, and on seeing them Sundarananda exclaims that in comparison with them the Sakya maiden is no better than a she-monkey with her nose and ears cut off. Back on earth he redoubles his efforts for the Buddha has assured him that if he meditates with sufficient intensity he will attain to that higher, heavenly world and there see the beautiful nymphs again. The other monks ridicule him for having such a lowly objective, and feeling shamed and humiliated he redirects his efforts and attains Nirvana. In the story Sundarananda ungallantly declares that in comparison with the heavenly nymphs his former love is no better than a she-monkey with her nose and ears cut off. This is not to suggest that she has no beauty at all, for there are degrees of beauty. That the higher beauty is higher does not mean that the lower beauty is not beautiful, much less still that it is ugly. Another story in the Buddhist scriptures makes this clear. The Buddha tells the ascetic Bhaggava that, contrary to what some people say of him, he does *not* say that when one reaches up to the liberation called the Beautiful one sees the whole Universe as ugly; what he does say is that when one reaches up to the liberation called the Beautiful one knows indeed what Beauty is.

From the beautiful young man in the hut I passed on to my poem ‘The Face of Silence’, to the appreciation of male beauty by two very different writers, to Plotinus and the *Enneads*, to beauty and love, and so to the story of Sundarananda and to the liberation called the Beautiful. I now want to return to the young man in the hut. In particular I want to say something about his beatific smile. He was oblivious of the presence of me and my friend, and his eyes were closed. He was therefore not smiling on account of anything he saw with his physical eyes, but because of what he saw with his inner vision. Perhaps he saw one of the heavenly nymphs, or the god Shiva, or perhaps he contemplated the impersonal Absolute of the Advaita Vedanta. Whatever it was he saw, he evidently delighted in it, and since he delighted in it he would have loved it. The degree of that love would have corresponded to the degree of the beauty he saw and since he was oblivious to the outer world it may be assumed that the beauty he saw, and the love which that beauty inspired, were not of the earthly kind. The principal difference between earthly love and heavenly love is that the former wishes to acquire, possess, and dominate its object and is associated with emotions of jealousy, as well as with fear and hatred of possible rivals. Heavenly love, on the other hand, experiences these emotions in a subtle form. Only spiritual or supersensible love is entirely free from them. It is not possible for one to experience earthly love at the same time that one experiences heavenly or spiritual love. One may enjoy earthly beauty at the same time that one experiences heavenly or spiritual beauty, but one will enjoy it on its own level, so to speak, and will not make it an object of attachment, whether gross or subtle. Blake says much the same thing in his poem ‘Eternity’:

He who binds to himself a joy  
Does the wingèd life destroy;  
He who kisses the joy as it flies  
Lives in eternity’s sunrise.

The face of the young man in the hut was radiant with a beatific smile, a smile that was expressive of his experience of inner bliss. But what of features cast in bronze or carved in stone? Were *these* capable of communicating that experience? Over the centuries Buddhist artists have sought to depict the Buddha in such a way as to give the worshipper an idea of his spiritual greatness. Their object was nothing less than to depict perfect Enlightenment in a human form. Few succeeded in doing this, even to a small extent, but their works are nonetheless among the masterpieces of world art. But what of the sculptors and painters themselves? Were *they* in touch, at least to an extent, with the spiritual experience that they were trying to express in their depiction of the Buddha? It is difficult to say. We do know that a Tibetan *thangka* painter should ideally meditate on the Buddha or Bodhisattva he is painting and repeat their mantra as he works. Similarly, in the Eastern Orthodox Church the icon painter is exhorted to fast and pray. Besides Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Buddhist artists have depicted the Arahants or those who, by following the teachings of the Buddha, have attained Nirvana. But not all these artists seek to represent, in the person of the Arahant Nirvana in a human form. In Chinese Buddhist art, Arahants are often depicted in a way that could be said to caricature them. Most are old, and some have crooked limbs and bulging eyes, while others are grimacing. Despite their common spiritual attainment the Arahants all have very individual characters, the artist seems to be telling us. In contrast to the Arahants, all of whom are monks, the great Bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī are beautiful young men wearing the garments and jewels of an Indian prince. Their expression is one of compassion, as in the unique wall painting of Padmapāṇi at Ajanta in central India. In Sino-Japanese Buddhism, Avalokiteśvara undergoes a transformation. From a beautiful young man he becomes a beautiful female figure known as Kuanyin. She wears a long white robe, her head is covered, and her expression is one of motherly kindness. In the West she is popularly known as the Goddess of Mercy and her likeness to the Madonna has often been remarked on. Perhaps the most extraordinary of Avalokiteśvara's transformations is the one in which he becomes the eleven-headed, thousand-armed Mahākāruṇika, or Greatly Compassionate One. The compassion of the Bodhisattva looks in every direction and he helps suffering sentient beings in every conceivable way. In the early days of the FWBO, now the Triratna Buddhist Community, I happened to be reading, or writing about, the myth in which Avalokiteśvara becomes the Greatly Compassionate One. As he contemplates the sufferings of sentient beings he is overwhelmed by compassion. So intense is the compassion his head splits into a thousand pieces. When I reached this point in the story I was very deeply affected. I started sobbing uncontrollably. In between my sobs I kept crying out to the friend who was with me, 'His head split into a thousand pieces! His head split into a thousand pieces!' This sobbing and crying out must have lasted for up to half an hour. I am not a person who sheds tears easily, and the experience has not been repeated, though the impression it made on me persists.

In these pages I have covered quite a lot of ground, but despite my aunt's prediction at no point did I discover in myself a predilection for short, fat little women with short, fat little legs.

## 10 Alternative Lives

In the summer of 1967 I moved with my friend Terry Delamare into a flat in Highgate West Hill. Though I did not know it at the time, it was to be my home for the next three years. ‘Our new home’, as I wrote many years later in an unpublished article,

was situated on the second floor of a Victorian terraced house; it consisted of two rooms and a kitchen, and from the back windows there was a view of Hampstead Heath. The landlady was a small, grey-haired woman of seventy who informed us, when we called in response to her advertisement in the *New Statesman*, that her name was Joy and that she was blind. That she was blind, or very nearly so, was evident from the condition of the hallway, the stairs and passages, and the vacant flat on the second floor, all of which were badly in need of redecoration. Landladies being a suspicious breed, Terry and I naturally had to give some account of ourselves. I do not remember if we told Joy that I was a Buddhist monk, but we certainly told her that I was a writer and that Terry was studying philosophy. No sooner was the word writer pronounced than the withered old face lit up with an expression of surprise and delight. A writer! Many of her friends had been writers, Joy assured us, and she liked to have writers as her tenants. In the days before the war a group of literary people who called themselves the Leopards had met at her house every week, and on one memorable occasion they had received a visit from Aldous Huxley. By this time Joy had led us into her sitting-room on the ground floor, the art nouveau furnishings of which had a shabby, dusty look. Here we paid our first month’s rent and it was agreed that we should move into the flat as soon as we had decorated the two principal rooms.

The decorating took Terry only two days and within the week we were installed in our new abode. At the time there were only two other tenants, a room on the first floor being occupied by a buck-toothed woman in her thirties and the attic by a young man in his early twenties. Joy had expressed the hope that the four of us would have coffee with her in her sitting room at eleven o’clock every Thursday morning and engage in intelligent discussion about books as the Leopards had once done. Terry and I would not have minded doing this, but the other tenants declined the invitation. They had full time jobs, they said, a fact that Joy seemed to have overlooked.

Neither Terry nor I encouraged visitors. In recent months much had happened to us and we needed time for reflection. I also had lectures to prepare while Terry was still suffering from depression and did not feel like meeting people. Though we gave our new address only to a few close friends, our whereabouts could not be kept altogether secret and before long people came knocking at the big, black front door of the house.

One of my most colourful visitors was my old friend and enemy Jinaratana Thera, whom Terry and I had last seen in Calcutta a few months earlier, when we were packing up my books and Buddhist artefacts for dispatch to the UK, and who was almost the last person I had expected to see in London. His robe was bright yellow and his bald pate shone with scented oil. He was on a world tour, he told me in his usual abrupt manner, and the Sinhalese monks in West London with whom he was staying had given him my address. In the India of

those days no self-respecting guru could afford not to have a world tour, a tour that would win him more disciples and enhance his reputation, and Jinaratna had more than once told me that as soon as he had saved up 25,000 rupees he would have a world tour of his own. Now here he was in London and his next stop would be Washington DC where there were Sinhalese monks and a small Theravāda centre. He asked me what I was doing, though more as a matter of course than because he was really interested. I told him that I had started a meditation centre in central London and was giving lectures in different parts of the town. He stayed no more than half an hour and I think I gave him tea.

Whereas Jinaratana had been known to me for many years, another colourful visitor seemed to come from nowhere. I do not remember her name, or how she came to know of my existence. She was Burmese, wore the traditional sarong and little jacket, and her thick black hair was so short as to be almost cropped. My earliest recollection of her is of her coming up the stairs holding a large bowl of trifle, and this may well have been our first contact. Thereafter she came quite a number of times, always bringing with her a trifle or a cake or some other comestible. Once or twice she was accompanied by a lanky Englishman of her own age, which I judged to be about thirty-five. He was interested in Zen, he told me, but otherwise he was silent. The lady herself was not interested in Zen. She invariably wanted to talk about pain and suffering and seemed to be confused between Buddhism and Christianity. Was she, I wondered, a 'born Buddhist' who had been educated in a Christian institution? Whatever her background, it was evident that she had an emotional investment in pain and suffering, and we had some intense discussions around the subject. On one of her visits she looked at the books in my bookcase and pulled out one of them. The title of the book was *The Theology of the Pain of God* and I was not altogether surprised when she asked if she could borrow it. I had read the book or had at least dipped into it. It was written by a Japanese Christian and so far as I remember it attempted to show that Japan was not the aggressor in the Second World War but the victim, for it was on Japan that the first atom bomb had been dropped. Japan had suffered as Christ had suffered on the cross, and her sufferings had a sacrificial quality that redeemed not only Japan but the world. The author seemed to have forgotten, or at least had disregarded, Japan's invasion of Manchuria, the Nanking Atrocities, the attack on Pearl Harbor, the enslavement of the Korean 'Comfort Women', and the brutal treatment of Allied prisoners of war. Unlike Germany, which did its best to atone for its Nazi past, Japan seemed disinclined to admit that it had done anything wrong, and it was not until 1998 that the Prime Minister of Japan wrote an open apology for his country's wartime past. Even so, he did not use '*shazai*', the key Japanese term for sorrow. As early as 1971, however, emperor Hirohito who had been Japan's head of state during the war, made a state visit to Britain at the invitation of the government. Like many others, I thought that he should never have been invited. No doubt relations with Japan had to be normalized, but Hirohito was an old man and it would have been more seemly if the Government had waited for his death and invited his successor.

Another colourful visitor was Jiyu Roshi, though she was colourful only metaphorically, not literally. She was shaven headed and wore a voluminous black robe that made her look bigger and fatter than she really was. I had corresponded with her in my Kalimpong days. She was then plain Peggy Kennett and a member of the Buddhist Society in London, of which I had once been a member myself. I am not sure why she wrote to me, for she wrote

only to tell me that she would be travelling to Japan, where she hoped to train in the Zen tradition. Her next letter was not from Japan but from Malaysia, and I gathered that she had been unexpectedly ordained there, though the nature of the ordination was by no means clear. Eventually I heard that she had arrived in Japan and been accepted into a Zen monastery. Now, having spent seven or eight years training in Zen, she was back in the UK and staying at Sarum House in Purley, Surrey, where there was a little FWBO community. I knew that she was coming since the proprietor of Sakura, the Japanese shop in whose basement I held my meditation classes, had been in correspondence with her. Emile was an aficionado of Zen, and he had urged Jiyu to settle in London and teach there instead of carrying on to the United States as was her plan. He had received a very strange reply. She could not possibly teach in London, she had told him. She had enemies there, and it would be dangerous for her to do so. In one of her aerogrammes she even wrote that she might be assassinated, and reading it I formed the distinct impression that she was suffering from paranoia. The supposed enemies, of course, were from the Buddhist Society where Zen was taught, though of a kind different from Jiyu's. I was therefore interested in meeting her and invited her to have lunch with me at the flat. She came accompanied by her shaven-headed, black-robed attendant and a casually dressed young American, and from the beginning she was very much on her dignity as a Roshi. I therefore decided to behave informally, which I did all the more easily as I was not wearing my robes. While I was serving up the meal, and while we were all eating, Jiyu and her attendant talked to each other in what I thought was a very artificial and stilted manner. They talked about various conflicts that were going on, within their own tradition back in Japan, at the same time nodding gravely at each other. They spoke slowly and deliberately, as though repeating words they had learned by heart, and I realized there was more in all this than met the eye. After the meal I asked Jiyu if it was true that she had decided to settle in the United States. She replied in the affirmative, adding that she would be establishing herself at a place called Mount Shasta, in California. I then asked her if she knew what the word *śāstā* meant in Sanskrit? It was a long time since she had done her Sanskrit, she replied rather haughtily, and I could see that I had offended her. I had certainly not intended to expose her ignorance of Sanskrit but only to point out the appropriateness of the name 'Shasta' for what she planned to establish there. It meant 'teacher', I explained, as in 'the teacher of gods and men', which was one of the titles of the Buddha. After Jiyu's departure with her entourage I reflected on the visit as I washed the dishes.

Later on I heard that some of the members of the Sarum House community had noticed that Jiyu's personal attendant was always hungry. At mealtimes, feeling sorry for him, they plied him with second and third helpings, but he was never satisfied. After a few days someone ventured to ask Jiyu if anything was wrong. Was he ill or undernourished, they wanted to know, and Jiyu was obliged to explain that he had been mirroring. They all overate, she declared, and her attendant was simply mirroring their behaviour in order to shame them out of it. So *that* was what the strange dialogue between Jiyu and her personal attendant had been all about! They had been mirroring, but what they had been mirroring and for whose benefit, I never knew. The famous mirroring technique seemed not to work in the West, from which I concluded that what worked in one culture could not easily be transplanted into a culture of a very different kind.

Like the Burmese lady, Kati seemed to come from nowhere. She was tall and dark haired, with a slightly swarthy complexion, and although only sixteen she was of an independent nature. I do not remember how we met, for she came neither to my meditation classes nor to my lectures. As I search my memory, I see in my mind's eye the saloon bar of the Prince of Wales in Highgate, where I used to go on a Saturday night when I was not away on retreat. I am sitting at the bar with my first or second vodka and lime and I am alone. At the other side of the room there sits a good-looking young man and he is accompanied by several women. Kati enters and joins the group but as soon as she sees me her face lights up with pleasure and she darts across the room and joins me at the bar. She is wearing her school uniform. We talk for a while, after which she goes back to the young man and his women. I know the story. The young man is married to one of the women, but his current girlfriend is also there, as well as his previous girlfriend. Though good-looking, he has a weak character and is very much under the thumb of his women. Kati is not in love with him as far as I know, but during the week she goes to see him in the evening and if his wife is away she spends the night with him. Otherwise, she comes and stays with me at the flat. By this time Terry has left me to live with his girlfriend Mafalda, and I have joined the two single beds together to make a double bed and Kati shares this bed with me. There is no question of sex nor is she very affectionate, but she likes me and we have become friends. She lives in Hampstead with her mother, who is a pianist I have heard on the radio, and it is too late for her to go home. The little rendezvous went on for five or six months, coming to an abrupt end when I moved from Highgate West Hill to Muswell Hill and ceased to frequent the Prince of Wales on Saturday night.

I cannot remember whether it was Dr Cooper who wanted to see me about Terry or whether it was I who wanted to see him about my friend. Whichever it was, we communicated through the medium of Terry who was seeing Cooper once a month and who was keen that I should meet the controversial psychiatrist. Once or twice he had turned up at the appointed time only to find Cooper too much under the influence of drink to be able to give him a consultation. His bill came at the end of the month as usual though, and I gathered this was all part of the treatment. At Cooper's suggestion we met at the Round House in Chalk Farm where he was attending a session of the Congress of Dialectics of Liberation. We would have half an hour together after the session ended. I arrived on time but the session was still in progress. It was not only still in progress but had run over time and the last speaker was still on her feet. She was a Swedish feminist and was shrieking rather than speaking about the outrages and humiliations to which women were subject all over the world. On and on she went, shrieking and weeping, until one of the organizers went up to her and took away the microphone. By this time it was long past the time for our meeting and Cooper had another appointment. He therefore invited me to have lunch with him, and a few days later I was sitting opposite him in a crowded and noisy restaurant in Soho. So noisy was it that no serious conversation was possible and I therefore invited Cooper to have lunch with me at the flat. He did not come alone but with his girlfriend whom I had not met before. She was a rather ordinary looking woman of about thirty-five. Cooper himself was overweight and balding and I judged him (wrongly) to be some years older than me. He was at that time perhaps at the height of his career and he and his more famous colleague, R. D. Laing, were names to conjure with in the world of the alternative community. Terry had told me much about him. He had founded the famous *Villa 21* for the treatment of young schizophrenics

and Terry had spent some time there after the breakup of his marriage, Cooper having diagnosed him as schizophrenic. Cooper had his own ideas about the genesis of schizophrenia and how it was to be treated and had developed what he called anti-psychiatry in opposition to orthodox psychiatry and its methods. So far as I remember, we did not discuss his theories and did not even discuss Terry very much. What I do remember is that in the course of the lunch I formed a very definite impression of Cooper as a man. He seemed to me to be like a big white mushroom, a mushroom that was thoroughly rotten within. I was therefore not surprised when I learned some years later that he had died of chronic alcoholism at the age of fifty-five.

In the course of my first year under Joy's roof the young man in the attic came to see me several times. His name was David and he had been born and brought up in Whitechapel. He was small in stature, fair haired, and he always dressed entirely in white. As I soon discovered, he was fond of metaphysical discussion, and tended to tie himself in knots that I could not unravel. I was therefore not sorry when he stopped visiting me. After he had visited me two or three times I thought I ought to pay him a return visit, so went up and knocked on his door. There being no response I pushed open the door, only to close it as quickly and quietly as I could. During the few seconds that it had been open I had caught a glimpse of two naked white bodies chasing each other round the room, one of them belonging to a girl who had been attending my retreats in the Surrey countryside. How the two had met I never knew, as David did not come either to my meditation classes or to my public lectures.

The attic did not remain long unoccupied after David's departure, his place being taken by a Nigerian student. I hardly ever saw him, for he kept to his room and seemed to spend all his time preparing for his examinations. One afternoon I answered the doorbell to find a neatly dressed young woman standing on the doorstep. She asked if the student lived there, mentioning his name. I replied that he did, and invited her to go straight up the stairs to the attic. Thereafter she came once a week, always on the same day, at the same time, and each time it was I who answered the door when she rang, for Joy was almost as deaf as she was blind and often did not hear the bell. One afternoon, as it happened, she did hear the bell when the young woman rang and answered it herself. What passed between the two women I never knew, but Joy had somehow managed to discover that the young woman had not come to take dictation, as I had assumed, but for a very different purpose, and she had lost no time in confronting the student with her discovery. What do you think he said, she asked me shortly afterwards, still agitated and indignant. He said it was his bodily need. His bodily need indeed! She had given him a month's notice on the spot. She was not going to have *that* sort of thing going on in *her* house. I felt sorry for the poor student and hoped that his next landlady would be more tolerant.

A few days before I moved to Muswell Hill, Joy told me, with evident satisfaction, that a young married couple would be moving into the basement flat. They would be decorating it at their own expense, she added, and they had told her that they would regard it as a privilege to live there. A privilege to live there! This was the sort of thing Joy liked to hear, as it bolstered up her idea that her house was still a sort of cultural centre. I could forgive this little weakness, as I knew that she needed not only more tenants but ones on whom she



could depend. In the course of the last three years she had more than once been ill in bed and unable to move and I had done her weekly shopping for her along with my own. The young couple would be no less helpful, I hoped. Perhaps they would even join her for coffee at eleven o'clock every Thursday morning.

## 11 On the Edge of the Etheric

He was tall and well built, with long back hair, and he wore buckskin leggings. The upper part of his reddish brown body was bare. He reminded me of the Red Indians about whom I had read in boys' weekly magazines when I was quite young. But he was not a Red Indian. He was an *āsura* or anti-god, a denizen of one of the six realms depicted in the wheel of life. We met in 1962 or thereabouts, when I was on a visit to Bombay. The two of us would have to fight, he told me. We would have to fight with rapiers, and whichever of us drew blood from the other would be the winner. He fought very well, but so too did I, and eventually I succeeded in drawing a thin red line diagonally across his chest with the point of my rapier. 'You have won,' he told me, 'and I shall have to give you something. In a few days time you will be in danger from fire and I will give you something that will protect you from it.' He then gave me the seed-syllable *rang*, which I knew to be the seed-syllable of the element of fire, whereupon he disappeared and I returned to my normal consciousness. It was not a dream, neither was it a vision. It was as though I had been with him in his own realm, the realm of the *āsuras*.

Two or three days later I happened to be giving a lecture on Buddhism. This was nothing new, as I always gave such lectures whenever I was in Bombay. What was new was the fact that on this occasion I was giving it in a building recently acquired by my friend Dinshaw Mehta, the founder of the Society of the Servants of God. He had acquired it for the activities of the Society and my lecture was part of the inaugural festivities. I was giving my lecture in a room on one of the upper floors, and there were between thirty and forty people present. Dinshaw presided, and sat next to me on the platform. I had been speaking for perhaps half an hour when I saw, out of the corner of my eye, someone enter the room and quietly hand my friend a slip of paper. The latter glanced at the paper, then quietly left the room. As I was well into my lecture I paid scant attention to what was going on and continued speaking. Twenty or more minutes later Dinshaw returned as quietly as he had left, resuming his seat beside me, and it was not long before my lecture came to an end. He afterwards told me what had happened. A room nearby had been turned into a meditation room, candles had been left burning there, and curtains had caught fire. He had been summoned and with the help of two other people he had been able to put out the blaze. It was most fortunate, he added, that I had been holding people's attention with my lecture. Had they known that a room was on fire only a few yards away they could have panicked and in the stampede for the exit people could have been injured or even trampled to death. I said nothing to my friend about the *āsura* or about what he had given me.

It took me only an hour to get from London to Brighton by train, and in the 1960s I used to visit the Brighton Buddhist Society every month. There was a meditation class, and from

time to time I would give a talk on Buddhism in a hired room above a tea shop. The meditation class was held at the home of an elderly married couple, the Wraggs. Usually I returned to London the same evening, but on more than one occasion I stayed overnight at the Wraggs occupying their comfortable guest room on the ground floor, next to the shrine room in which the meditation classes were held. In this way I got to know Carl and Violet quite well and even came to regard them as friends. They had been Spiritualists for many years, becoming interested in Buddhism quite late in life. As a bookcase in the guest room testified, they had read widely in the fields of comparative religion and mysticism, and I was in the habit of dipping into one of their books before going to bed. I particularly remember dipping into the *Sephar Zohar* or 'Book of Splendour', the fundamental text of the Kabbalah in five volumes, which I had not seen before. One day I heard that Violet had died, and I went down to Brighton for the funeral. Carl showed no sign of distress. For him, Violet was not dead, and when his two sons-in-law turned up in black he told them to go home and change into ordinary clothes. The funeral was almost a merry affair and we must have scandalized the solemn-faced undertaker's men with our lightheartedness.

On my next monthly visit to the Brighton Buddhist Society I stayed with Carl who was living alone, so to speak, on the upper floor of the house. He greeted me warmly, sat me down in the sitting room in my usual chair, and went off to prepare tea. I had not sat there for more than a few minutes when Violet entered the room and seated herself opposite me, as she usually did. We then talked for a while, as we always did, and she then left me. When Carl returned with the tea I told him that I had just seen Violet. 'Oh yes,' he replied, 'she's always around.' I have more than once told friends about my experience of seeing Violet and talking with her when, in the ordinary sense of the word, she was dead. Each time I have emphasized, as strongly as I could, that it was not Violet's ghost that I had seen and talked with. It was Violet herself.

'Would you mind taking over from me for a while?' Terry asked me, putting his hand over the mouthpiece of the telephone. He had been on the phone for more than three hours, talking to a friend and trying to persuade him not to commit suicide. On my agreeing to take over, Terry spoke again to the friend. He was with a Buddhist monk, he told him, and he was sure the monk could help him. Would he like to speak to the monk? The friend agreed to do so, and I took the phone from Terry. I already knew the man's history. His girlfriend had left him and he felt that as he could not live without her he had no alternative but to commit suicide. I must have spoken to him for about two hours, after which Terry took over from me and spoke to his friend again for an hour or more. By this time it was one o'clock in the morning and it seemed that between us, Terry and I had succeeded in persuading him not to commit suicide. Terry therefore went home and I went to bed. At five o'clock the man's mother phoned to say that her son had just committed suicide. I was not really surprised. While talking to him I had the distinct impression that I was talking not to a human being but to a demon, a demon who had taken possession of Terry's friend and driven him to commit suicide. I knew that should one allow oneself to be overwhelmed by a violent negative emotion such as craving, or hatred, or fear, one could eventually lay oneself open to possession by a negative psychic entity. In the case of Terry's friend he had been overwhelmed by grief for the loss of his girlfriend and felt he could not live without her. An 'evil' non-human entity had been able taken charge of him and he had committed suicide.

Broom House Farm was located just within what may once have been a forest and was now a vast conifer plantation. It was conveniently near Thetford in Norfolk and in the early 1970s I used to run retreats there for a dozen or more people. One of these retreats was an ordination retreat, the ordination ceremony being held in the loft of the small barn that stood next to the farmhouse. I also once spent a few days at the farmhouse with a companion. One evening we happened to be sitting in the living room, he on one side of the fireplace, in which a log fire was burning, and I on the other. Suddenly my companion exclaimed, 'What's wrong? You look as though you were being attacked.' I replied, 'Yes, that is what I feel, I feel as though I was being attacked.' The attack was not physical but psychological, as though I was being attacked by invisible non-human entities. The attack did not last very long. I realized that I had in my hand and had just been reading some literature that a friend had sent me from Findhorn, an intentional community in north-east Scotland, and that this literature contained references to what it called *devas*. Clearly, these were the non-human entities that were attacking me. I threw the literature into the fire, whereupon the attack ceased. In a sense I had brought the attack upon myself. The friend in question had been to see me before his departure for Findhorn and I had asked him to send me some of its literature.

The following morning I had much to think about when I had my solitary walk along one of the broad, straight tracks that ran through the plantation. Why had the *devas* attacked me? Had I done anything to offend them? Such were my thoughts as the track took me further and further into the plantation. There was no sign of animal or bird life, and it was eerily quiet. I became aware that the trees were very angry. They were angry because they were all close together and forced to grow upwards to where they had a small crown of greenery which alone ever saw the light. Perhaps it was the tree spirits that were angry rather than the trees themselves, and perhaps the tree spirits were related to the Findhorn *devas*, though why the latter had attacked me that evening at Broom House Farm I never knew.

One Christmas in the late 1960s, finding myself alone in the Highgate flat, I decided to spend the holiday reading *The Lord of the Rings*, the three volumes of which a friend had just lent me. I read the first volume on Christmas Eve, the second on Christmas Day, and the third on Boxing Day, and thus for a while found myself living in the mythic world of the elves and the ents, of Sauron and Gandalf, the hobbits Frodo and Sam, Shelob and Gollum, and the other creations of the writer's fertile imagination. *The Lord of the Rings* and its cast of characters, both good and evil, soon became part of the counter-culture of the times and no one in the FWBO thought it strange that one of its country retreat centres should be called Rivendell, that being the name of the home of Elrond, one of the elves. The mythic Rivendell was hidden in a deep valley whereas the FWBO Rivendell was located in the flat Sussex countryside. In the 1980s I held there a ten day ordination retreat for women, occupying a separate wing of the building. Though I led the meditation and gave talks, I still had enough time to write a chapter of *Ambedkar and Buddhism*, the book on which I was working at the time. One night I woke up at two o'clock in the morning and realized that there was somebody else in the room. As it was dark I could not see anything but I felt that quite near me there was a cold sinister presence that sent shivers up my spine. I recited a mantra and the presence slowly withdrew. It visited me on at least two more nights. I said

nothing to the women about my nocturnal visitor, as I did not want to alarm them or spoil the atmosphere of the retreat. Later on I learned that a woman had committed suicide at Rivendell, it being then the rectory of the neighbouring church.

It was Tuesday, 30 January 1990. Paramartha and I were having breakfast in our flat above the London Buddhist Centre when I suddenly *knew* that I had to see my mother that very day. She was then in hospital in Southend-on-Sea and I had seen her only a few days before, and on leaving had promised to see her again in two weeks time. But now I had to see her that very day. Paramartha did not question my intuition, and we set out for Southend-on-Sea as soon as we could. Having arrived in the town before visiting hours, and wanting to get some exercise, we walked along the front in the direction of Leigh-on-Sea. The sky was overcast, a cold wind was blowing, and although it was midday one would have thought that it was already four o'clock.

On arriving at the hospital we went straight to the ward where I thought to find my mother, on the way passing through a room in which there were four beds. The bed in the corner was empty and the thought struck me that that bed may have been occupied by my mother. The ward sister of whom I enquired where I would find Mrs Wiltshire wanted to know who I was and I said, 'I'm her son.' For a moment or two she was silent, then she said, 'I am sorry to have to tell you that your mother died at two o'clock this morning.' I was stunned by the unexpected news, but all I said was, 'Is it possible to see her?' The ward sister said she would find out, then ushered us into a waiting room, gave us tea, and left. We talked a little about what had happened and I was glad that Paramartha was with me. An hour later the ward sister returned. 'You can see her now,' she said, whereupon we were taken through a series of rooms to the mortuary chapel. My mother's body lay covered with a white sheet except for her head, behind which was the altar. She looked very dead. Though there were the same sunken eyes, now closed, the same large, prominent nose, and the same small mouth, they looked as though were carved in wood and had never been made of flesh. Paramartha seated himself on the other side of the body while I seated myself on this side so that we faced each other across it. I took my *mālā* from my pocket and Paramartha, with a little smile, took out his. We then chanted the Vajrasattva mantra in unison for about half an hour. All this time we were aware that a foot or more above my mother's chest there was an area within which there was some kind of electrical or psychic vibration. We left the chapel quietly, closing the door behind us, and soon we were out of the hospital and on our way back to London.

There were three unusual things about our experience. While having breakfast that morning I had known that I had to go and see my mother that day. There were only two previous occasions in my life when I had been visited by a similar experience, both of them connected with the death of someone I knew. Then, I had never before taken my *mālā* with me when I went out and neither had Paramartha, yet before we left the flat we had both slipped a *mālā* into our pocket without knowing that the other had done so. No wonder Paramartha had given me that little conspiratorial smile as he took his own *mālā* from his pocket. Finally, there was the strange phenomenon of the area above my mother's chest in which there was some kind of electrical or psychic vibration. Did this mean that my mother was not really as dead as she seemed to be? If what the ward sister had told me was correct,

when we saw my mother she must have been dead for a little over twelve hours. But I knew that according to some Buddhist traditions it took rather longer than that for the consciousness to sever its connection with the body.

The sound of the voice did not wake me up, for I was already awake, listening to the faint sound of traffic on the Aslacton Road. It was a soft, warm, friendly voice, and it was quite near. 'Hello Bhante-ji,' the voice said. It was an Indian voice, as I knew from the intonation. And though it was dark in the bedroom and I could not see anything, I knew that there was someone with me. One of my Indian Buddhist friends must have died, I thought, and had come to pay me a final visit. The sound from the Aslacton Road grew fainter, and soon I was fast asleep.

## **12 The Young Florence Ketskemety**

My mother's earliest memory was of being in a perambulator with her younger brother, Jack, and being pushed round Battersea Park by her eldest sister, Kate, who had brought her up, her mother having died when she was very young. Jack was connected with another early memory. On Sundays straight after Sunday school the brother and sister had to go and pay their respects to their aunts, Faith, Hope and Charity, who were unmarried and lived together. All three dressed in black, with buttons right up to the throat, but although they looked very severe they always treated their little visitors kindly. After they had made their little bobs to each of the aunts in turn, a rather formal conversation would ensue and Florence and Jack would each be given a glass of lemonade. As soon as they were out of the house, the two children would scamper down the street, laughing and shouting, glad that the constraints of the visit were over. My mother never spoke about her schooldays, but she did tell me how she used to help her Hungarian grandfather in his grocery shop in Vauxhall Bridge Road. Though he had lived in England for much of his life, her grandfather's command of English was far from perfect, and my mother had picked up from him a few words of Hungarian. The shop being situated in a working-class district many of its customers were quite poor. Mothers would send their children to buy a ha'p'orth of pickles and she remembered giving them the pickles in a paper cone. Her father was a clarinetist and had been in the army. She was his youngest daughter, and very much his favourite. He used to call her his little fairy, she once told my sister and me, and from the way she said it, it was clear she had been very fond of her father. He had once taken her with him when he had a professional engagement in France. The Channel crossing may very well have been a rough one for my mother more than once spoke of her fear of the sea. 'You won't catch me going on the water', she would say. After their father's death the brothers and sisters would gather on Saturday night at the family home, where some of them still lived, for a fish supper. George, the eldest brother, would preside, asking each of them in turn, 'haddock or kipper?'

At the time of her father's death the young Florence Ketskemety may already have been living not in Fulham, where she grew up, but in Merton with her sister Kate and Kate's husband, Dan. He was a tall, well-built Irishman with a loud voice and a crude sense of humour. At parties he would put three fingers up the chimney into the soot, then make three

black stripes on the sleeves of the girls' white silk blouses, despite their protests. He called this 'making them sergeants'. He was also not above trying to take liberties with his young sister-in-law. Once he went so far that she threatened to tell Kate if he persisted. 'He was not a nice man,' she commented many years later when telling me about the incident. After leaving school, Florrie, as she was called, worked in a laundry. 'That's why I've got strong arms,' she once told me years later, not without a touch of pride. She also practised regularly with the India clubs, and was fond of playing diablo. My father once told me and my sister, Joan, that when our mother was a girl she could throw the 'devil' up in the air in one street and then run round the block and catch it as it came down in the next street. Joan and I were then both quite young and could not always tell if our father was serious or pulling our leg.

When Florrie was sixteen the First World War began, and it was not long before she left the laundry to work as a waitress in the restaurant of the Army and Navy Stores in Victoria Street, where her elder brother Bert was manager of the catering department. At the time waitresses were a novelty, but the waiters having all joined up their places had to be filled up somehow. One day Florrie had a terrifying experience. She still lived with Kate and Dan in Merton, and was on her way home from work when she became aware of the silver shape of a Zeppelin high in the air above her, and it was going in the same direction as herself. On coming to a crossroads she turned left and the Zeppelin too turned left. Convinced that the silver monster was now following her she took to her heels and ran all the way home. Nearly seven hundred Londoners were killed by bombs dropped from Zeppelins, and nearly two thousand were seriously injured, and Florrie had good reason to be frightened. Florrie's elder brother Tom was in the army as was her younger brother Jack. Tom was better suited to military life than his more sensitive brother and it was not long before Jack deserted, taking refuge in the family home in Fulham. Looking out of the window one day Tom saw in the street below two policemen who were looking for Jack and called out to them, 'Come and get the bugger! He's here!' His sisters shrieked and did their best to drag Tom away from the window. What happened next I never learned. What I did learn, years later, was that Tom had died as a prisoner-of-war in Silesia and that after the war Jack had suffered a nervous breakdown.

As a young woman, my mother naturally had interests outside the family and her workplace. She once told me that there was a young man whose eye she seemed to have caught. He was in the army and was a regular visitor at Kate and Dan's place where he used to entertain them all by playing on the piano. This was the family piano on which all the brothers and sisters had practised and which had passed into Kate's keeping on the death of their father. I remember that piano very well, for from Kate it had eventually passed to my mother and I remember her playing on it occasionally when I was quite small as I sat on the floor near her feet. Besides working as a waitress, the young Florrie was an active member of the VAD or Voluntary Aid Detachment. A photo in my possession shows her wearing her VAD uniform. It was probably taken in a studio for she stands with her right hand resting lightly on the back of a chair and with her right foot slightly advanced. She wears a trench coat belted at the waist together with dark stockings and sensible shoes. The face beneath the dark beret is rather thin with a big nose, and she looks straight ahead. The impression I get as I look at the photo is of a young woman of some strength of character. Part of her work as a member of the VAD consisted in visiting wounded soldiers who were convalescing. One of the hospitals

within her area was St Benedict's in Tooting and it was there that she met my father who was recovering from shrapnel wounds in his right arm. Neither of them ever spoke of their first meeting, or of their courtship, but a day came when the young Florence Ketskemety could display on the third finger of her left hand a diamond ring.

<sup>1</sup> More money came in after the 90th birthday celebrations so that the final count was around £135,000.

<sup>2</sup> The Centre in Bethnal Green opened in 1978, and became known as the London Buddhist Centre. Sukhavati was adopted as the name for the men's community above the Centre.