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## SUNDAR SINGH

During the past fifty years much new information has come to light about Sundar Singh's life and work. Reminiscences, interviews, letters, diaries, biographies, theological estimates—all these have become available to us. They are written in English, German, French, Swedish, Urdu and Hindi. The present book is written by one who knew Sundar Singh personally and has now studied these documents with care. The first edition was published by Lutterworth Press in London in 1958 at thirty shillings a copy. This cheaper edition has now been produced in India by the Christian Literature Society. Sundar Singh was a priceless gift of God to the Christian Church and his life and teaching should be kept alive in the hearts and minds of men.

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## **Sundar Singh : A Biography**

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SUNDAR SINGH

Taken during his tour in Europe and America

# SUNDAR SINGH

A Biography

By

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## CONTENTS

### *Introduction*

Chapter	Page
1 EARLY YEARS	17
2 THE YOUNG SADHU	26
3 IN TIBET	37
4 THE FAST	49
5 IN THE HIMALAYAS	57
6 THE MAHARISHI	65
7 IN WESTERN INDIA	84
8 SOUTH INDIA AND CEYLON	92
9 THE FAR EAST AND TIBET AGAIN	103
10 VISIT TO ENGLAND	118
11 AMERICA AND AUSTRALIA	134
12 MAN OF PRAYER	143
13 IN SWITZERLAND	153
14 GERMANY, SCANDINAVIA AND HOLLAND	164
15 LIFE AT SUBATHU	175
16 VISIONS OF THE SPIRITUAL WORLD	192
17 THE LAST YEARS	202
INDEX A. SUBJECTS	221
INDEX B. CHIEF PERSONS MENTIONED	223
INDEX C. CHIEF BOOKS MENTIONED	225



## INTRODUCTION

WAS Sadhu Sundar Singh a passing fashion or is he a permanent figure in the Christian Church, likely to inspire many generations to come?

A great many of those who know his life and work will be inclined to agree with Queen Wilhelmina (who ruled over Holland for fifty years) in her judgment about Sundar Singh. She wrote:<sup>1</sup> "I never met him, I know him only from his books and the books about him. I belong to those who are deeply impressed by his life and teaching and I am sure the way he manifested his radiant love for Christ and His peace, and in general his teaching, was a real help to me in the worst episodes of the terrible catastrophe that was the last war. Indeed, Sundar Singh was not 'a passing fashion' but a man whose example and teaching should always be remembered."

I met Sadhu Sundar Singh for the first time at Oxford on February 22, 1920, in the Community House of the Cowley Fathers. I was then a post-graduate student in the University, writing a thesis on St. John and the Hindu Bhakti Poets. I had had no occasion to meet Sundar Singh in India, as he belonged to the Punjab and worked on the Himalayas and in North India until 1917 and my home was at Palamcottah in the extreme south of India, not far from Cape Comorin.

The subject of mysticism had greatly attracted me for some years. While I was studying theology in America, a newspaper called *The Christian Patriot* had come to me from Madras, week after week, giving glowing accounts of Sundar Singh's work in India, Ceylon and the Far East. Like other Indian Christians I had been stirred by these reports of an Indian preacher who, both in his life and in his teaching, interpreted Christianity in a way which made a great appeal to India. So, when I came to know that Sundar Singh was at Oxford, I called on him soon after his arrival and asked him whether he would speak in a number of meetings in the University during the week he spent there (February 22-28, 1920). To this he gladly agreed, for preaching was of the very essence of

<sup>1</sup> In her letter to me dated October 24, 1949.

his Christian service and he was always eager to share with others the rich experience he had in his communion with the Living Christ. I listened to all the addresses he gave while at Oxford, had several conversations with him about his inner religious life and made full notes of what he said.

My tutor (the distinguished theologian Canon B. H. Streeter) and I then proposed to him that a permanent record of his teaching might be of value, and he agreed. I spent about a fortnight with him in London and Paris, making further notes, and was present at the interviews he had with various important persons such as the Archbishop of Canterbury and Baron F. H. von Hügel. Canon Streeter also heard several of his addresses and had many long talks with him. Both Canon Streeter and I then spent a year working at our study of the life and teaching of Sundar Singh, which appeared under the title of *The Sadhu*.<sup>1</sup>

When Sundar Singh visited Switzerland in 1922 I spent a week with him in Lausanne and Geneva listening to his addresses.

After his second visit to Europe in 1922 Sundar Singh's health broke down. He made Subathu his headquarters and returned there for rest between his tours. Subathu is 4,000 feet high, ten miles from Dharampore, on the mountain railway to Simla. I visited him at Subathu in 1923 and again in 1928 and spent a week with him on each occasion. These were my personal contacts with him besides occasional correspondence.

When *The Sadhu* was written, our main source of information was Sundar Singh himself. We also had before us two books about Sundar Singh by Alfred Zahir entitled *A Lover of the Cross and Soul-Stirring Messages*. For the main facts of his life we depended on Mrs. Parker's little book, *Sadhu Sundar Singh : Called of God*. We also made extensive use of the reports of some of his addresses. We considered carefully a memorandum on him which had been written for us by Baron von Hügel. Our aim was not to write a biography of Sundar Singh but to describe his inner life, to set out the main elements of his teaching and to judge the value of his life as well as of his teaching in the light of modern psychology.

A great deal of new material for understanding Sundar Singh (enigmatic and baffling in some respects) is now available. I should like to indicate these fresh sources of information.

<sup>1</sup> It had a wide circulation all over the world and passed through many editions. It was also translated into several European and other languages. There seems to be no demand for the book now and the publishers tell me that it is not likely to be reprinted. This book was published in America with a different title—*The Message of Sadhu Sundar Singh*.

Before Sundar Singh came into prominence, he wrote in Urdu during the years 1912 to 1917 a series of letters in a Christian paper called *Nur Afshan*, giving reports of his work. An English translation of the *Nur Afshan* letters is now in deposit in the Central Library in Zürich. Through the kindness of the Director of the Library I have been able to use these important papers.

A brief chronicle of his early journeys, which Sundar Singh wrote in Urdu and which was printed only once, has now come to light. An English translation of this travel diary was made by Mrs. Parker.

Dozens of letters which Sundar Singh wrote to his friends have been sent to me. Sundar Singh did not, as a rule, write long letters describing the events of his life, outer or inner. But he was a prompt correspondent and tried to answer all the many letters which reached him. Some of these letters, though quite brief, give interesting glimpses of his inner life as well as of his public activities. A series of thirteen letters which he wrote towards the end of his life to a friend in America (Pastor Goddard) on the problems of the future life, after he had studied the writings of Swedenborg, is of particular interest.

Between 1921 and 1928 he wrote six small devotional books : *At the Master's Feet*, *Reality and Religion*, *The Search after Reality*, *Meditations on Various Aspects of the Spiritual Life*, *Visions of the Spiritual World*, and *With and Without Christ*. These books gave intimate glimpses of his spiritual development and contained many of his beautiful parables. Slight though they were, they had an extensive circulation and were translated into as many as forty languages, even before his death.

In his home at Subathu several files of newspaper cuttings giving accounts of his meetings, particularly during his first tour to Europe, were found. There were also numerous letters which people wrote to him from different parts of the world asking him for spiritual guidance. These are called the Subathu papers in this book. They have been lent to me by the Trustees of the Sadhu Sundar Singh Trust Fund, to whom my thanks are due.

Many friends of Sundar Singh are still alive. They have sent me their reminiscences and newspaper cuttings about his work. Some of the reminiscences are of outstanding importance. Mr. Vincent S. David, a leading layman in the Diocese of Bombay, is one of those who have been profoundly influenced by Sundar Singh. Mr. Vincent David travelled with him as his interpreter on different occasions and also visited him at Subathu. He said that he had so many reminiscences to give me that he himself could not put them down in writing but that I should go to Bombay and write down what he had to say. This I was able to do. Mr. Vincent David has

an unusually clear and vivid memory, and he dictated to me many interesting recollections. We need to remember, however, that these recollections are thirty-three years old and that it is possible that his memory has modified some of the facts.

The most careful arrangements were made for Sundar Singh's tour in Switzerland in 1922. In no other country which he visited had the arrangements been more thorough. Wherever he went he addressed large meetings and for almost every meal there were groups of people to meet him, once as many as twenty-eight. A shorthand typist, Miss Goodwin, was engaged to travel with his party and to take down in shorthand all his addresses as well as the answers which he gave to the questions in small parties. She did her work very conscientiously. She kept a full, frank and intimate diary in which she put down every little incident and saying which was likely to throw light on his character. When in one place he was asked to offer an extempore prayer Miss Goodwin quickly opened her notebook and took down the prayer in shorthand. It was a beautiful prayer and we are glad to have it. But it would have been very difficult for Sundar Singh to live, hour after hour, under the pressure of such publicity.

The shorthand reports of his addresses were afterwards translated into French and published under the title *Par Christ et Pour Christ*. Pastor G. Secretan added to this book a Foreword giving a brief but vivid account of the Sadhu's tour in Switzerland. The Goodwin diary, shorthand reports in English of all the addresses he gave while in Switzerland, the questions which were asked him, the answers which he gave and the French book *Par Christ et Pour Christ* are all available now, providing ample material for an account of Sundar Singh's work in Switzerland.

In 1940 Mlle. Alice van Berchem wrote in French a biography of Sundar Singh with the title *Un Témoin du Christ*. Besides giving a careful summary of his life and teaching, it contains some new material about his work in Switzerland.

Archbishop Soderblom, a great scholar on the history of religions and Archbishop of Uppsala at that time, wrote about Sundar Singh in two Swedish books, *Tre Livsformer* and *Sundar Singh's Budskap*. These books contain an independent estimate of Sundar Singh and give some reminiscences of his work in Sweden. I am grateful to the Rev. B. Fr. Tiliander for reading through them carefully and translating into English the passages included in this book.

*Sadhu Sundar Singh : A Personal Memoir*, by C. F. Andrews, is a book of great value for an understanding of Sundar Singh. C. F. Andrews knew Sundar Singh intimately when he was young. Being himself of a mystical bent of mind, C. F. Andrews is able to

bring out with great clearness the inner life of the Sadhu. With his marked literary gifts, long experience in writing and deep Christian life, C. F. Andrews has produced a striking portrait of Sundar Singh.

The Rev. T. E. Riddle, who knew Sundar Singh from 1912 to 1929 and helped him to translate from Urdu into English four of his devotional books, wrote in *The United Church Review* in 1946 a series of eleven articles which are of much value as another account of Sundar Singh by one who had moved with him closely over a long period of years. Mr. Riddle has now had these articles published in New Zealand as a book, with the title *Vision and Call*, by the Overseas Missions Committee, Presbyterian Church of New Zealand.

After Sundar Singh's return from his second tour in Europe in 1922 a violent controversy broke out about his honesty. The Roman Catholics could not understand how a man of his spiritual stature could appear outside their own Church. The Modernists were baffled by the many miracles which he narrated as having occurred in his life. Both the Roman Catholics and the Modernists joined hands and every event of his life was examined with the minutest care. Sundar Singh was not a historian. He kept no diary. He described again and again from memory many incidents in his life as illustrations of the saving power of God. These many versions were studied most critically.

Father Hosten, S.J., wrote a series of hostile articles in *The Catholic Herald of India* denouncing Sundar Singh as an impostor.

Dr. Pfister, a Protestant pastor in Switzerland, wrote in German a book entitled *Die Legende Sundar Singhs* in which he made out that the miraculous experiences to which he laid claim were nothing more than his own subjective fancies.

Professor F. Heiler wrote three books in German about Sundar Singh. His book, *Sadhu Sundar Singh : Ein Apostle des Ostens und Westens*, is now available in English under the title *The Gospel of Sadhu Sundar Singh*. This book, written before the controversy, is a careful study of the life and teaching of Sundar Singh with numerous interesting comparisons and contrasts between Sundar Singh and the great saints of the Christian Church such as St. Francis, St. Augustine, Thomas a Kempis, Luther and others. When Sundar Singh's honesty was called in question, Professor Heiler wrote another book about him entitled *Apostel oder Betruger?* He also sent out a circular to all those who had had any personal contact with him and asked them for every fragment of information they had about him. The material which he collected and the conclusions to which he came are now available in the German book entitled *Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*. These three books have provided much material for my biography.

The Rev. P. Gabler, who worked as a Lutheran missionary in South India, wrote in 1937 a dissertation, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, in German for the Theological Faculty of Leipzig. He examined with minute care all the books and papers by his enemies as well as his friends. The conclusion to which he came was that Sundar Singh told many lies, though we had also clear evidence that the grace of God rested on him and that his ministry was really fruitful. I am unable to accept this conclusion, for reasons which I have set out in the chapter entitled "Life at Subathu". Pastor Gabler's treatise contains a text of 172 pages in small type, a bibliography in sixteen pages of the books and pamphlets written by or about Sundar Singh, and notes of nearly one hundred pages. All this material has been collected with much painstaking thoroughness. Pastor Gabler continually seeks to be fair and impartial in his judgments. But without a personal knowledge of Sundar Singh he errs fatally in many of his conclusions. His book, however, is a mine of information for the Sadhu's biographers.

The time has come to gather together the stories of the men and women whose lives were changed by their contact with Sundar Singh. There were thousands of people who were greatly impressed by what he said and did and whose own Christian faith was deepened by hearing his addresses or reading his books. My enquiries for the past seven years have made it clear that there were also men and women whose entire lives were transformed by God through Sundar Singh's instrumentality. It is difficult to make an accurate and comprehensive list of such people, partly because his work was spread over many countries and partly because many people are reticent about the deepest experiences of their spiritual life and are unwilling to write down for publication what he has meant to them. Some moving stories of how the lives of men and women have been permanently influenced through his ministry have, however, been sent to me. These stories are included in this *Life of Sundar Singh*.

As Christianity takes root in different countries with their ancient philosophic and spiritual cultures, certain elements of its teaching receive new emphasis. The religion of Jesus Christ is for the whole world. It is so infinitely rich that different nations with their characteristic gifts interpret and emphasize this or that aspect of its teaching. We, today, speak constantly of a World Church. We look for interpretations of Christianity made by the different nations of the world. We feel sure that the tributes which are laid at the feet of Jesus Christ by different countries are of great value to the whole Church. A study of the life and teaching of Sundar Singh makes it certain that some of the noblest longings of the Indian soul which he inherited were offered up to Christ and received a fresh beauty under His touch. The immense crowds which gathered to hear Sundar Singh when he visited the different countries of the world and the wide circulation of his books con-

vince us that he has, under the providence of God, a distinctive message for the World Church. A devoted follower of Christ and a genuine Indian, his life as well as his teaching are of great significance.

Numerous people have helped me to write this book. I would like to thank them all for their prompt and generous response to my request for reminiscences, letters, reports of addresses, etc. In particular I am indebted to Professor Heiler for sending me much valuable material. Mrs. Soderblom has sent me a copy of all the relevant letters in Archbishop Soderblom's files. The Rev. H. A. Popley and Dr. M. P. Davis have sent me their files for study. The Rev. M. C. Langton has translated into English the relevant passages from the French book *Par Christ et Pour Christ*. Dr. P. E. Burckhardt, Miss Biberstein, and the Rev. Hans Zimmermann have translated from German into English the passages needed for this book. M. Senaud and Pastor Rougemont have sent to me all the papers connected with Sundar Singh's visit to Switzerland. Sri S. J. Duraiswamy, General Secretary of the National Missionary Society in Madras, has sent to me a copy of all the articles in *The National Missionary Intelligencer* about Sundar Singh. Father Lazarus of the Russian Orthodox Church has read through the manuscript and suggested various improvements. To all these friends I should like to express here my warm thanks.

Readers of this book who may have reports of Sundar Singh's sermons or articles written by him are requested to send them to me so that another book dealing with his teaching may be written.

A. J. APPASAMY

Coimbatore,  
July 31, 1956.

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A. J. A.



CHAPTER I  
EARLY YEARS

1889-1905

SUNDAR SINGH was born on September 3, 1889, in a small village called Rampur in the Punjab. His father was a rich landlord owning extensive wheatfields, and the family lived in great comfort.

Sundar's parents were followers of the Sikh religion, which sought to blend in itself the best elements in Hinduism and Islam. The founder of this religion was Guru Nanak (1469-1538). He was followed by several Gurus. Govind Singh (1675-1708) made the whole Sikh community into a well-disciplined military organisation. He boldly aspired to destroy the Muslim power in India, and welded all his followers into a powerful warlike community. All the Sikhs were to be called Singhs, meaning lions. They were forbidden to study the sacred books of the Hindus or the Muslims. They were to keep their hair uncut and were always to carry a knife and a sword.

Sundar Singh has given us some glimpses of his childhood :

“ I was born in a family that was commonly considered Sikh, but in which the teaching of Hinduism was considered most essential, and my dear mother was a living example and faithful exponent of its teaching.

“ She used to rise daily before daylight, and, after bathing, used to read the *Bhagavad Gita*, and other Hindu Scriptures . . . . She early impressed on me the rule that my first duty on rising in the morning was that I should pray to God for spiritual food and blessing, and that only after so doing should I breakfast. At times I insisted that I must have food first, but my God-fearing mother, sometimes with love and sometimes with punishment, fixed this habit firmly in my mind, that I should first seek God, and after that other things. Although at that time I was too young to appreciate the value of these things, yet later on I realized their

value, and now, whenever I think of it, I thank God for that training, and I can never be sufficiently thankful to God for giving me such a mother, who in my earliest years instilled in me the love and fear of God. Her bosom was for me my best theological school, and she prepared me, as much as she was able, to work for the Lord as a Sadhu.

“My mother for some years instructed me from the holy books of the Hindu scripture, and then handed me over to a Hindu pundit, and to an old Sikh Sadhu. . . . I recognize that I got some degree of consolation from this teaching, but I was still hungering for real peace. They taught me with great sympathy, and freely gave me the benefit of their experiences; but they had not themselves had that real blessing for which my soul was craving, so how could they help me to get it? . . . .

“I frequently asked the pundit to explain my spiritual difficulties for me. He said: ‘Your difficulties seem to be of a new and strange kind. I can only say that when you grow up and get more experience and knowledge about spiritual life, these difficulties will disappear of themselves. Don’t worry about these things at present.’

“I said to him: ‘Suppose I do not live till I grow up, then what will happen? Besides, this getting one’s hunger or thirst satisfied does not depend on age or on whether one is big or little. If a hungry boy asks for bread would you say, “Go and play, and when you are big and can understand the real meaning of hunger, then you will get bread”? . . . If you have not got it, then please tell me where and how I can get it. If you do not know where I can get it, then say so.’ The pundit said: ‘You cannot understand these deep spiritual things now. You cannot get to this grade of spirituality all at once. To get to it a long time is essential. Why are you in such a hurry to get to it? If this hunger is not satisfied in this life it will be satisfied in your next rebirths, provided you keep on trying for it.’ So saying, he evaded me, and my problem was not solved.

“I spoke to the Sadhu several times about my difficulties, but he also gave me a somewhat similar answer: ‘Do not worry about it. When you get knowledge (*Jnana*), all these difficulties will disappear.’ I replied: ‘No doubt it is true that when I obtain this perfect ultimate knowledge my difficulties will disappear, but even at this stage the little knowledge that I have should remove some of my difficulties, while I should be able to hope for further enlightenment in the future. But I do not see how this increase of knowledge will be able to do much, for it looks as if further knowledge will result in my needs and difficulties being still more clearly seen by me, and how will these new needs be met?’

“The Sadhu replied: ‘Not with imperfect, finite knowledge, but with perfect and final knowledge will your needs be met; for when

you get perfect knowledge you will realize that this need, or want, is only an illusion, and that you yourself are Brahma (God) or a part of Him, and, when you realize this, then what more will you need ?' I persisted, 'Excuse me, but I cannot believe this, for if I am a part of Brahma, or am myself Brahma, then I should be incapable of having any *Maya* (Illusion). But if *Maya* is possible in Brahma, then Brahma is no longer Brahma, for he has been subordinated to *Maya*. Hence *Maya* is stronger than Brahma himself, and *Maya* will then not be *Maya* (Illusion) but will be a reality that has overcome Brahma, and we shall have to think of Brahma himself as *Maya*, and this is blasphemy.

"In this way, instead of helping me you are throwing me into a whirlpool. I shall be most thankful to you, if from your experience and knowledge you can help me to know Him so that I may satisfy my spiritual hunger and thirst in Him. But please remember that I do not want to be absorbed in Him, but I do want to obtain salvation in Him.' Then he said: 'Child, it is useless to waste time on these things now. The time will come when you yourself will understand these things.'

"Again I was disappointed. I could not find anywhere that spiritual food for which I hungered, and in this state of unrest I remained till I found the Living Christ."<sup>1</sup>

At Oxford Sundar Singh told us that in addition to all this study of the sacred scriptures of India he learnt to practise Yoga, which has been followed as an effective method of meditation in India through the ages. He even attained a mastery of the Yoga technique and became oblivious of the external world for short spells. During those moments he experienced in some measure the peace and joy for which his soul craved. But when he returned to consciousness, he was again plunged into the turmoil of unrest and discontent.

Sundar Singh's narrative of his spiritual experiences in childhood continues:

"From my earliest years my mother impressed on me that I should abstain from every kind of sin, and should be sympathetic and helpful to all in trouble. One day when my father had given me some pocket money I ran off to the bazaar to spend it. On the way I saw a very old woman famished with cold and hunger. When she asked help from me, I felt such pity that I gave her all my money. I came back home and told my father that he should give the poor woman a blanket or she would die of cold. He put me off by saying that he had often helped her before and that it was the turn of the neighbours to do their part.

<sup>1</sup> Sundar Singh, *With and Without Christ*, pp. 90-96.

“ When I saw that he was not willing to help her, by stealth I extracted five rupees from his pocket, intending to give it to her to buy a blanket with. The thought that I should be able to help her gave me great satisfaction, but the thought that I was a thief pricked my conscience. My distress was further increased in the evening when my father, on discovering that the rupees were missing, asked me if I had taken them, and I denied it. Though I had escaped from punishment, my conscience so tormented me the whole night that I could not sleep. Early in the morning I went to my father, and confessed my theft and my lies, and gave back the money. In spite of the fear that he would punish me the burden was at once removed from my heart. But instead of punishing me, he took me in his arms, and with tears in his eyes said : ‘My son, I have always trusted you, and now I have good proof that I was not wrong.’ He not only forgave me, but spent the five rupees on a blanket for the old woman, and gave me another rupee for myself to buy sweets with. After that he never refused when I asked for anything, and on my part I decided that I would never do anything that should be against my conscience, or against my parents’ will.

“ Some time after this my mother died, and a few months later my elder brother also died. This brother’s nature and turn of mind were very like my own. The loss of these two dear ones was a great shock to me; especially did the thought that I should never see them again cast me into despondency and despair, because I could never know into what form they had been reborn, nor could I ever even guess what I was likely to be in my next rebirth. In the Hindu religion the only consolation for a broken heart like mine was that I should submit to my Fate, and bow down to the inexorable law of Karma.”<sup>1</sup>

Let Sundar Singh now tell the story of his conversion :

“ I was sent, for my secular education, to a small primary school that had been opened by the American Presbyterian Mission in our village at Rampur. At that time I had so many prejudices about Christianity that I refused to read the Bible in the daily Bible lessons. My teacher insisted that I should attend ; but I was so opposed to this that the next year I left that school and went to a Government school at Sanewal three miles away, and there I studied for some months. To some extent I felt that the teaching of the Gospel on the love of God attracted me, but I still thought it was false and opposed it. So firmly was I set in my opinions, and so great was my unrest, that one day, in the presence of my father and others, I tore up a Gospel and burned it.

“ Though, according to my ideas at that time, I thought I had done a good deed in burning the Gospel, yet my unrest of heart

<sup>1</sup> Sundar Singh, *With and Without Christ*, pp. 96-99.

increased, and for two days after that I was very miserable. On the third day, when I felt I could bear it no longer, I got up at three in the morning, and after bathing, I prayed that if there was a God at all He would reveal Himself to me, and show me the way of salvation, and end this unrest of my soul. I firmly made up my mind that, if this prayer was not answered, I would before daylight go down to the railway, and place my head on the line before the incoming train.

“I remained till about half past four praying and waiting and expecting to see Krishna or Buddha, or some other *Avatar* of the Hindu religion; they appeared not, but a light was shining in the room. I opened the door to see where it came from, but all was dark outside. I returned inside, and the light increased in intensity and took the form of a globe of light above the ground, and in this light there appeared, not the form I expected, but the living Christ whom I had counted as dead. To all eternity I shall never forget His glorious and loving face, nor the few words which He spoke: ‘Why do you persecute me? See, I have died on the Cross for you and for the whole world.’ These words were burned into my heart as by lightning, and I fell on the ground before Him. My heart was filled with inexpressible joy and peace, and my whole life was entirely changed. Then the old Sundar Singh died and a new Sundar Singh, to serve the living Christ, was born.

“After a little while I went to my father, who was still sleeping, and told him of the appearance, and that I was now a Christian. He said: ‘What are you talking about? It is only three days since you burned their book. Go away and sleep, you silly boy,’ and he himself turned over again. Later on I told the whole family what I had seen, and that I was now a Christian. Some said I was mad, some that I had dreamed; but, when they saw that I was not to be turned, they began to persecute me. But the persecution was nothing compared with that miserable unrest I had had when I was without Christ; and it was not difficult for me to endure the troubles and persecution which now began.”<sup>1</sup>

This vision of Christ, which Sundar Singh saw on December 18, 1904, made a profound difference to his whole life. From that time he became an ardent disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ and sought to proclaim His message far and wide. He told the story of this vision again and again in his addresses. His critics have collected the various accounts which he gave at different times of this vision, and have pointed out numerous discrepancies. Some of them have even gone to the length of saying that he made it up. Others have held that it was a purely subjective experience. To such critics his reply always was that he never expected to see

<sup>1</sup> Sundar Singh, *With and Without Christ*, pp. 99-102.

Jesus Christ. He would not have been surprised if he had seen Krishna or Buddha. But this vision of Jesus Christ was as a bolt from the blue and took him entirely by surprise.<sup>1</sup>

I have quoted this version as it was written down by himself, though not until 1928, twenty-four years after the event. While speaking to immense congregations, particularly in the course of high-pressure evangelistic tours in different parts of the world, a man cannot weigh his words as carefully as he can in the quiet of his study. Reporters also make many blunders. For this reason I have given the preference to Sundar Singh's own written record.

To the autobiographical glimpses of Sundar Singh's early life we may add some further information about his youth given in 1927 by his schoolmate, John W. Chauhan, who in after years became Secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association in Lahore.

"I first met Sadhu Sundar Singh twenty-six years ago in the American Presbyterian Mission School at Rampur.<sup>2</sup> My father was the Headmaster of that School. Sundar Singh was five or six years older than I was but we began to learn our ABC at the same time. We immediately became friends. My father began to take an interest in him, because he was my friend and also because he was clever and hard-working in his studies. He was quiet and contemplative and took only a small part in the school sports but he walked every morning and evening, either alone or with friends, in his own compound. That was his recreation. He was also a very good swimmer and used to swim in the canal which ran near by.

"We were together for two years, when my father was transferred to a town five miles from Rampur. During these two years I never heard Sundar speak an ugly word such as those which other farmers in the Punjab were accustomed to use.

"From the very beginning his purpose was to become a Sadhu, but at that time he hardly knew that he was to become a Christian Sadhu and a living witness for Christ our Saviour. I am proud of the fact that I was the first to whom he expressed the wish to become a Christian. I immediately told my father. My father was outwardly happy to hear this but he was also afraid of the powerful Sikhs and especially of his father. My father considered teaching him the Bible. And it was decided that he would instruct him at midnight after his father had gone to watch the fields and the cattle. This Bible study lasted several months until my father was transferred. My father was very sorry to leave both his school and his pupil. The Sikhs had found out that he had been teaching their

<sup>1</sup> P. Gabler, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, pp. 44-46.

<sup>2</sup> Sundar was twelve years old at that time.

sons the knowledge of Christ. They were very disturbed and many pupils were forbidden to come to the school. We moved to Khanna, a town in Ludhiana District. I heard one year later that the Rampur school was closed because of the hostility of the Sikhs.”<sup>1</sup>

The call of Jesus to Sundar Singh to follow Him was so clear and definite that after the vision he began telling his relations and friends that he was going to become a Christian. At first they did not take him seriously. When they found that he was quite firm in his desire to become a Christian, they tried by every possible means to dissuade him. They mocked him, scorned him and persecuted him. His own brother was bitter against him and ill-treated him. The missionary-in-charge of the school at Rampur, the Rev. E. P. Newton, was accused before the local authority of making Sundar Singh a Christian by force, but Sundar Singh bore witness to the teacher's innocence before the magistrate. The feeling against the Christians in the village, however, became so strong that many of them had to leave the district. Sundar Singh himself went to the Presbyterian High School at Ludhiana and took refuge there.

After his glowing vision of Christ he was deeply disappointed and shocked by the nominal Christian life which the boys in the school led. So, unable to continue in the school, he returned to his family, where he was welcomed. His people thought that he had now given up his desire to become a Christian. But no, he was as firmly resolved as before to become a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, who had appeared to him in the vision and had called him. To show that he was no longer a Sikh, he cut off his long hair, a serious step indeed. From that time forward the family cast him off completely.

In later years he described thus his first night away from his home :

“ I remember the night when I was driven out of my home . . . The first night I had to spend, in cold weather, under a tree. I had had no such experience. I was not used to living in such a place without a shelter. I began to think: ‘ Yesterday and before that I used to live in the midst of luxury at my home ; but now I am shivering here, and hungry and thirsty and without shelter, with no warm clothes and food.’ I had to spend the whole night under the tree. But I remember the wonderful joy and peace in my heart, due to the Presence of my Saviour. I held the New Testament in my hand. I remember that night as my first night in heaven. I remember the wonderful joy that made me compare that time with the time when I was living in a luxurious home. In the midst of luxuries and comfort I could not find peace in my heart. The

<sup>1</sup> F. Heiler, *Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*, pp. 42-44.

presence of the Saviour changed the suffering into peace. Ever since then I have felt the Presence of the Saviour."<sup>1</sup>

Sundar Singh then went to the village of Rugar and sought help from the Presbyterian minister there, the Rev. P. C. Uppal. One of Sundar's relations had mixed poison in his food before he left home and it began to work. He broke down completely as soon as he reached Mr. Uppal's house. Speaking in Geneva, in 1922, Sundar Singh described this incident :

"I used to think that persecution was impossible to bear, but through it I realized His Presence and fellowship with His suffering and also that He is living in us . . . On one occasion my relations wanted to give me poison and put it in my food, I ate it and the next day I was on the point of death. The doctor said there was no hope. I felt sure I would recover and bear witness for my Saviour. The doctor would not give me any medicine, for he was certain I was going to die, and if he gave me anything and I died, people would say that it was he who had poisoned me. When I regained consciousness I told the doctor to read St. Mark chapter 16. He began to laugh at the story of the Resurrection, as the Rationalists do today. They don't understand miracles because they have not experienced them, but those who have, find no difficulty. In the morning I felt quite fresh and received new life. The doctor came and when he saw me sitting in the sun he was very surprised and ashamed and went away without saying a word.

"I saw nothing of him for a long time, but some years later, when visiting Burma, I met him at a meeting. 'Do you recognize me?' he asked. 'Yes,' I answered; 'I last saw you when on my death-bed.' He told me that my miraculous recovery had made such an impression on him that he had begun to read the Bible and was a Christian."

This doctor was Sundar Singh's first convert. He was followed in course of time by many more.

After his recovery, Sundar Singh was sent to the Christian Boarding School at Ludhiana. John Chauhan, his schoolmate at Rampur, became his schoolmate also at Ludhiana. He has written thus about that time.

"In 1905 my father sent me to study in the Christian Boys' Boarding School at Ludhiana. Lo, after a few months I was suddenly called by the Headmaster (Dr. Fife) for an interview. I went trembling and fearful, but there I saw Sundar Singh and was told to take him to the class, where he also was to study.

"I was delighted to see him. He was grown much and was stronger and bigger than me. In the short free period he told me

<sup>1</sup> *The Bible in the World*, June 1920.



that he had come from Rupar where he had gone in order to become a Christian. But his parents and relatives had persecuted him and poisoned him that he might die . . .

“ His father soon discovered that Sundar Singh was staying in the school in Ludhiana and came with a large crowd of people in order to take him away by force. Only his father was allowed to see him. The others were persuaded to leave the school building immediately. I was present at this conversation and I can never forget the dreadful scene. His father begged and implored him to leave the school and not to become a Christian. But Sundar Singh said, ‘ It is impossible. I am a Christian and always want to remain one. I love Christ.’ The father then wept bitterly and also Sundar Singh, and I also wept. The father then stopped weeping and became inhuman and threatened him in many ways. But all this was of no avail. He went away without Sundar Singh but with a warning that he would come again in order to kill him. His people came again three or four times but they were not allowed to see him. Finally our summer holidays came and I came home to Khanna. He never returned to school.”<sup>1</sup>

On account of the constant trouble from his relations Sundar Singh was asked to go to Subathu, where there was a Leper Home run by the Presbyterian Mission. There he studied the Bible and was getting ready for baptism. According to Indian law he could not be baptised until he was sixteen. Dr. Fife sent him on September 2, 1905, with a letter of introduction to the Rev. J. Redman, a missionary of the Church Missionary Society at Simla, and asked him to baptize Sundar Singh. Mr. Redman has thus written about his interview with Sundar before the baptism :

“ I was deeply impressed by his sincerity. I examined him carefully, and asked him a great many questions about the chief facts of the Gospel. Sundar Singh replied to my entire satisfaction, and he evinced even then an extraordinary knowledge of the life and teaching of Christ. Then I enquired into his personal experience of Christ as his Saviour. Again I was more than satisfied. And I told him I would be very glad to baptize him on the following day, which was a Sunday. He replied that he desired to be baptized because it was the will of Christ, but that he felt so sure that the Lord had called him to witness for Him, that even if I could not see my way to baptize him, he would have to go out and preach.”<sup>2</sup>

Sundar Singh was baptized in St. Thomas’s Church at Simla by Mr. Redman on September 3, 1905, the exact date on which he attained his sixteenth year.

<sup>1</sup> F. Heiler, *Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>2</sup> F. Heiler, *The Gospel of Sadhu Sundar Singh*, p. 54.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE YOUNG SADHU

1905-1911

ON October 6, thirty-three days after his baptism, Sundar Singh began his life as a Christian Sadhu.

From early days the desire to become a Sadhu had been instilled in him by his deeply spiritual mother. With tears she had besought him not to become a wordly man like his brothers but to become a Sadhu--a holy man, a man of God, who had no attachment whatsoever in the world. In his later years Sundar Singh said that his mother had made him a Sadhu but the Holy Spirit had made him a Christian.

Both at Rampur and at Ludhiana he had told his classmates that he had a longing to live the life of a Sadhu. His aspiration was to go from place to place and to preach Christ, whom he had seen in a glorious vision. The desire to follow in the footsteps of His Master, who had nowhere to lay His head, became strong in Sundar Singh and he resolved to proclaim far and wide the Christian Gospel; not to receive any money for this work; to eat when food was offered to him, to go hungry if no one gave him food; to sleep under a roof if he was invited to do so, otherwise to sleep under a tree or in a cave or in a broken-down or vacant house. His Master had suffered for him and so he would also suffer. That would be his greatest joy—to serve and suffer for Jesus who loved him so deeply.

In his Urdu travel diary Sundar Singh says that he left Subathu on October 6, 1905 and preached in and around Kasauli, Solon, Dagshai and Simla. He then went on an evangelistic tour throughout India: in the Punjab, Sindh, the United Provinces, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras.

He says he went to Rampur, his native place, where the people listened well. "In the evening I went to my home. At first my father refused to see me, or to let me in, because by becoming a

Christian I had dishonoured the family. But after a little while he came out and said : ' Very well, you can stay here to-night ; but you must get out early in the morning, don't show me your face again. ' I remained silent, and that night he made me sit at a distance that I might not pollute them or their vessels, and then he brought me food, and gave me water to drink by pouring it into my hands from a vessel held high above, as one does who gives drink to an out-caste. When I saw this treatment, I could not restrain the tears flowing from my eyes that my father, who used to love me so much, now hated me as if I was untouchable. In spite of all this, my heart was filled with inexpressible peace. I thanked him for this treatment also . . . and respectfully I said good-bye, and went away. In the fields I prayed and thanked God, and then slept under a tree, and in the morning continued my way."<sup>1</sup>

After travelling by way of the Khyber Pass to Afghanistan, and then preaching in Kashmir, Sundar Singh continues his diary :

" From Kashtawar by way of Jammu I travelled in the direction of Kotgarh and Simla, and here I met Mr. Stokes. He asked me to stay with him for a time, ' and, ' said he, ' if it is the will of God, I myself desire to serve along with you in the Sadhu style, because for India that is the best method of service. ' Therefore he distributed all his property and possessions to the poor and adopted the life of a Sadhu.

" We went to a village named Jhangi, where for the night we had not only no place to sleep, but not a single morsel did we get to eat, but about midnight some person gave us a loaf of maize bread and lodged us in a filthy cowshed, in which was cowdung. All night, pestered by bugs and feeling the cold, we did not sleep at all . . . We remembered that the King and Creator of the two worlds, Himself leaving His glory, had for our sakes condescended to be born in the Manger of Bethlehem, and we passed the night in prayer. Rising in the morning we proceeded towards Simla and then on to Subathu, where we stayed about a month. Here we were engaged in the hospital for lepers, washing their wounds and preaching the Gospel to them, and several of them became Christians. After this we went to Lahore for the purpose of working amongst those stricken with smallpox ; and from there Mr. Stokes went to America."<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Stokes has given a vivid account of the work which he and Sundar Singh did from August 1906 to November 1907, thus confirming what Sundar has written in his travel diary. Stokes was a young American with considerable private means who had come out to India to do evangelistic work. He was not attached to any missionary society. He tells us that at first Sundar Singh and he

<sup>1</sup> Sundar Singh, *With and Without Christ*, pp. 108-110.

<sup>2</sup> Sundar Singh, *A Collection of Incidents*, pp. 3-5.

were looked upon with suspicion and the people whom they sought to serve even bullied and persecuted them. But when they saw that the Sadhus bore with them patiently and continued their selfless ministry they became friends. The people were eager to supply them with food and pressed them to stay on in their villages. But they said that they had to move to other places to carry on their work of ministering to those stricken with plague and leprosy. It was not merely illiterate villagers but also educated folk who responded to this ministry which was carried on by Stokes and Sundar Singh. They did not speak about Christ unless others opened the subject. Many educated men would come to see them and they would talk about whatever subjects were brought up. The religion of Jesus Christ came up again and again for discussion.

Stokes says : " It may seem curious to some that I chose to enter upon the Friar's life when seeking a way to imitate our Lord. It was because Jesus has always seemed to me the perfect Friar. For the Friar, as the blessed St. Francis conceived him, was one who tried to conform his life in all particulars to the life of Jesus.

" In August 1906, if I remember rightly, I distributed what things I possessed among the people who needed them, and, after three days spent alone in prayer, assumed the Friar's robe and the obligations of a Friar's life.

" Some weeks after I had changed my life, an Indian Christian was moved to join me. He was a convert from the Sikhs and had been travelling about the country as a Christian Sadhu (holy man) for more than a year before he took the vows and put on the robe of a Friar. When my work took me to the plains, he remained in charge of our interests up in the mountains, and laboured so faithfully and with such effect that all were astonished. His work has been far better than my own, and although he is scarcely more than a boy he has suffered hunger, cold, sickness and even imprisonment for his Master.

" We had been some hundreds of miles back into the interior, and had been forced to pass through some very unhealthy country. Sundar Singh was attacked by fever day after day, and also by acute indigestion. At length one night when we were trudging along he became so bad that he could no longer walk and fell fainting on the road. Our way ran through the mountains and there was a bank by the side of it. To this I dragged him and set him against it in such a way that his head might be higher than his feet. He was trembling with the chill which preceded the fever, and his face was drawn with the pain caused by his stomach trouble. I was anxious because we were alone and on foot and the weather was very cold. Bending close to his ear I asked him how he was feeling. I knew that he would never complain but I was unprepared for the answer

which I received. He opened his eyes and smiled absently, then in a voice almost too low to be heard said, 'I am very happy ; how sweet it is to suffer for His sake.' This spirit is the keynote of his life and the dominating influence in all he does.

"The man who suffers against his will speedily becomes a physical wreck ; but if he suffers of his own free will, impelled to do so by his ideal, there is hardly any limit to his powers of endurance. This I have seen in Brother Sadhu Sundar Singh and in Hindu *Bhagats* (devotees), and know from what I myself have undergone.

"Until November 1907, only Sundar Singh and I had been engaged in this work. It was too great an undertaking for two men, but we felt convinced that, if carried on properly and by sufficient numbers, it would have far-reaching results. It was, therefore, decided that I should go back to my home for a few months to appeal for men. So I am in America. Men are needed who will give their lives to this work. Their lives will count ; I speak not from theory but in the light of experience."<sup>1</sup>

The account which Mr. Stokes gives of the thoughts which inspired him at that time, and of the Christian service, which he carried on in co-operation with Sundar Singh, is valuable. Sundar Singh was quite young. It was fortunate for him that in those impressionable years he worked so closely with a slightly older man who was inspired by the highest ideals of Christian service and sacrifice and who genuinely sought to put them into practice. We also see clearly that Sundar Singh proved an apt pupil and that he caught something of the Franciscan spirit of service through his American friend.

Mr. Stokes on his return from America established in 1910, under the auspices of the Anglican Church, the Brotherhood of the Imitation of Christ. He and the Rev. F. J. Western of the Cambridge Mission to Delhi (later the Bishop in Tinnevely) were the only persons who joined the Brotherhood. Sundar Singh did not become a member of the Brotherhood, as he felt called to work on his own without associating himself with any organized religious community. His soul craved for freedom and individuality. The Brotherhood came to an end in August 1911, when Stokes decided that he could serve India best by marrying an Indian woman and living a normal family life.

The Rev. C. F. Andrews was at that time a Professor in St. Stephen's College, Delhi.<sup>2</sup> From 1907 to 1911 Andrews went to Kotgarh on the Simla Hills every year for the hot weather along with his great friend, Mr. S. K. Rudra, the Principal of the College. There they came into close and intimate contact with Sundar Singh.

<sup>1</sup> S. E. Stokes, *The Love of God*, pp. 1-20.

<sup>2</sup> See Benarsidas Chaturvedi and Marjorie Sykes, *Charles Freer Andrews*.

Kotgarh lies in the heart of the Simla Hills on the Hindustan-Tibet Road. A little farther up the road the Hindu temples are no longer visible in the landscape, but Buddhist shrines are to be found in every village and on every mountain slope. Not far distant is Tibet, the land of Buddhism. Beyond Kotgarh, as far as Central Asia, Buddhism is the prevailing religion everywhere.

The Hindustan-Tibet Road is a very remarkable and difficult engineering construction carried out seventy years ago. It runs up and down altitudes ranging from 4,000 to 12,000 feet. Just beyond Kotgarh there is a tremendous dip—a descent of 3,000 feet in five miles—where the Sutlej River flows tumultuously through a deep mountain valley. Then there is a climb of 4,000 feet over a distance of five miles up the mountains. For a long stretch of years Sundar Singh walked in these regions, with bare feet and a thin robe, on his incessant ministry of preaching the Gospel. In *Nur Afshan* we read constantly of Kotgarh and the Hindustan-Tibet Road. People who want to take rest from the toil and bustle of the plains seek peace in Kotgarh.

In *The Christian Century* of Chicago C. F. Andrews wrote : “ There was a cave just above the village of Kotgarh. That cave became the home of Sundar Singh and Stokes, and his little band of young lads who came up with him. They were indeed a very strange company. Two were children of lepers, who were themselves suspected of leprosy ; another was blind, one was a cripple. There were five in all and every one of them was a waif and stray of humanity. Stokes had fathered and mothered them all and had taken them like a hen under his own wing. But a merrier company you would rarely meet in the world. They hardly knew what sorrow was. They lived a simple life of the most abstemious kind.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1934 C. F. Andrews wrote a book bearing the title *Sadhu Sundar Singh : A Personal Memoir*. This book gives many sketches of Sundar Singh's life and work in those early years before he came into public prominence. Andrews describes vividly his first meeting with Sundar Singh in 1907 and draws the only pen-picture we have of him as a youth.

“ One day we met Sadhu Sundar Singh. He was still quite young in age and youthful also in appearance. His wistful shyness had first to be overcome before he could be altogether at ease with us. For we were complete strangers to him and he had only recently become a Christian. During the time of transition from his old life to the new he had met with many difficulties and some unexpected rebuffs. Therefore he was diffident and reserved until he came to know us intimately as his friends. Then his whole

<sup>1</sup> C. F. Andrews in *The Christian Century*, November 11, 1931.

nature blossomed out in a singularly happy manner and he won our hearts by his gentle goodness.

“ His face had the look of childhood fresh upon it, in spite of marks of pain which were there also. At first sight, however, it was not so much his face that attracted my attention as his marvellous eyes. They were luminous, like the darkly gleaming water of some pool in the forest which a ray of sunlight has touched. While there was a shade of sorrow in them, there was also the light of joy and peace.

“ During the larger part of the time we were together, he seemed almost entirely to be absorbed in his own thoughts. But suddenly there would come into his eyes a flash of quick intelligence as he looked up and said a few words in reply to some question. The discipline of inner self-restraint was noticeable, and when he made a remark the effect was all the greater because of his previous silence.

“ In later years, the dignity of his presence deeply impressed me ; but on that first occasion I seemed to see nothing but those eyes of his looking into my own and offering me his friendship. They seemed to tell me, without any formal words, how great a treasure his soul had found in Christ, and how he had realized at a glance that my heart was one with his own in devotion to the same Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

“ While he was in Delhi with Mr. Rudra, ” C. F. Andrews says, “ Sundar Singh used to spend the greater part of his spare time with the Christian students in the Hostel. They sat up with him into the long hours of the night, and very soon became intensely eager to go up to Kotgarh and live with him there, so that they might catch something of his own brave spirit. He did what no older man could have done ; for he was young like themselves.

“ The change which came in this manner was marvellous to witness. One of the students, a cricketer and athlete, gave up assured prospects in Government service for directly Christian work. Another made up his mind to enter the ministry of the Church for a life of sacrifice and devotion. When one of the College sweepers who as an ‘ untouchable ’ was ill, one of those who had come most of all under the influence of the Sadhu went into the sweepers’ quarters and stayed with him and nursed him through his illness. Such a thing had never happened in the history of the College before.

“ What, it may be asked, was the attraction that made such a wonderful change ? Nothing that was merely second-rate could possibly have effected it. No mode of living, half in comfort, half

<sup>1</sup> C. F. Andrews, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, pp. 20, 21.

in self-denial, could have worked such a miracle. But Sundar Singh's life could stand the test. It was reckless in its self-spending. He had counted the cost. The Cross was not preached only, but lived—and that made all the difference.”<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Shoran Singha, Y.M.C.A. Secretary in England for some years, has written about a strange occurrence during those days.

“ One night,” he writes, “ just before we went to bed, we noticed lights moving in the valley, and the Sadhu explained to me that men were probably in pursuit of a leopard... Long after midnight I was roused by a movement in the room. The Sadhu had risen from his bed and was moving towards the door, which opened on the wooden stairs outside the house. The creaking of the wood made it clear that he was going down. Knowing that the Sadhu spent hours of the night in prayer, I was not surprised at this. But when half an hour or so had passed and he had not returned, I became uneasy: the thought of the leopard in the valley made me feel anxious. So I got out of bed, passed into the dressing-room, and looked out of the window towards the forest. A few yards from the house I saw the Sadhu sitting, looking down into the deep valley. It was a beautiful night. The stars were shining brightly; a light wind rustled the leaves of the trees. For a few moments I watched the silent figure of the Sadhu. Then my eyes were attracted by something moving on his right. An animal was coming towards him. As it got nearer I saw that it was a leopard. Choked with fear, I stood motionless near the window, unable even to call. Just then the Sadhu turned his face towards the animal and held out his hand. As though it had been a dog, the leopard lay down and stretched out its head to be stroked.

“ It was a strange, unbelievable scene, and I can never forget it. A short time afterwards the Sadhu returned and was soon asleep, but I lay awake wondering what gave that man such power over wild animals.”<sup>2</sup>

After 1922 a heated propaganda broke out against Sundar Singh. His critics held that he was dishonest and untrustworthy, as there was no evidence which would satisfy a historian for some of the miracles which he said had taken place in his life. C. F. Andrews did not seek to refute these criticisms one by one. But with great sympathy and insight he pointed out that Sundar Singh believed fully in the supernatural and, being subject to visions and ecstasies, was often unable to distinguish the subjective from the objective. Sundar Singh, according to C. F. Andrews, took for reality events which had occurred only in his mystic visions.

<sup>1</sup> pp. 113, 114.

<sup>2</sup> Shoran Singha, *More Yarns about India*, pp. 164, 165.



“ From his earliest childhood, the daily instructions he received from the Hindu Scriptures brought before his singularly receptive mind incredibly romantic legends about divine heroes who performed wonderful deeds and lived miraculous lives. The stories of the Sikh martyrs were also replete with glowing incidents of noble endurance. His own daily life, in the large household of Sardar Sher Singh, his father, stimulated his thoughts in these directions. For all the members of the family, including his own mother, believed in the supernatural with heart and soul. They would therefore encourage the young lad's eagerness to penetrate into those mysterious things which were of absorbing interest to themselves. Neither he, nor they, had yet come into such close contact with modern critical thought as to raise any doubt or question about the validity of what their forefathers had told them.”<sup>1</sup>

“ When Sundar Singh became a Christian this innate love of the marvellous was in no way diminished. The extraordinary character of his own conversion led him directly to that inner kingdom of the soul where miracles are of daily occurrence, and the line which divides the outward from the inward becomes almost invisible. In his Urdu New Testament he used to read concerning the wonderful deeds of Christ described in the Gospels. The Acts of the Apostles showed to him the very same deeds continuing in the early Church. Therefore, as he went forward step by step in his discipleship, seeking humbly to follow Christ, he passed into a world of new Christian experiences, which corresponded in some degree with the miraculous world of imagination he had inhabited before. The object of his worship was Christ: the supernatural character of events remained the same.”<sup>2</sup>

“ During the long solitary journeys which Sundar took, year after year, in the Himalayas, these creative powers of his own imagination had full play. Like some new opening scene in the great drama of the Apocalypse, the Holy City would seem to be about to ‘descend out of heaven, from God’. No wonder he held fast to a literal ‘Second Coming’ in the clouds of heaven of the Son of Man and would have nothing to do with those who spiritualized away the literal words. One of his favourite texts was taken from the Book of Revelation, where the prophet writes: ‘Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him; and they also which pierced him.’

“ Not only inwardly, but also outwardly, during these adventurous journeys, he seemed to be moving in a world of spirit. His passion for solitude and his practice of trance-like moods evidently increased this initial childhood's difficulty of distinguishing fact from imaginative vision. For the more he lived in the midst of Nature, with her haunting voices, and became one of her favoured

<sup>1</sup> C. F. Andrews, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, p. 156.      <sup>2</sup> p. 157.

children, the more extraordinary his spiritual experiences became. During a period of years, while he was still young, he spoke openly about these with a freedom that he afterwards regretted. For he found that men and women turned to him as a marvel-worker and did not turn to Christ. The discovery of this made him much more reticent, until at last he ceased to speak about such abnormal incidents altogether."<sup>1</sup>

"Once I heard the story of a moment of extreme peril of imminent death when some hillmen rescued him from a flooded river in the Himalayas. He believed absolutely that angelic beings bore him up and transported him to the farther shore. He saw them in a vision before he lost consciousness, and when he had come back to life they had disappeared. We are constantly faced, in his own personal records of what happened to him, with narrative of this kind."<sup>2</sup>

In 1908, as Sundar Singh was preaching in the bazaar in Simla, he saw a Tibetan Christian named Tharchin. He had already met him as a domestic servant of the Moravian missionary, Schnabel, when he lived for six months at Kotgarh. Tharchin kept a careful diary and gives exact dates. He was working as a coolie carrying stones and was in ragged clothes. Sundar Singh recognized him and said to him: "Is it you, Tharchin? Come with me. I will look after you." Sundar Singh lived in St. Thomas's Library in Simla, which belonged to the Church Missionary Society. Tharchin went with Sundar Singh and served him and two or three other Indians who lived in the same place for three months, helping in the kitchen and doing also other work. During this time Sundar Singh taught him Hindustani.

Tharchin had a varied career. When the complete Tibetan Bible was printed in 1949 Tharchin and David Macdonald of the Kalimpong Church gave much help in revising and editing it. No missionary is allowed to go into Tibet, and yet this Bible has been published in the faith that God will open the doors for its entrance into Tibet. Recently Tharchin has been ordained as a minister in the Church of North India, and is in charge of the Tibetan Christians in and around Kalimpong on the Himalayas. We shall hear of him from time to time in the course of this biography. He gave Sundar Singh some help in his missionary work in Tibet and in Nepal. Tharchin still holds Sundar Singh in great veneration and says that in matters of religion Sundar Singh has greatly influenced him.<sup>3</sup>

In 1909, when Sundar was twenty years of age, Dr. Lefroy (the Anglican Bishop of Lahore) arranged for him to take a theological course in St. John's Divinity School in Lahore with a view to

<sup>1</sup> pp. 158, 159.

<sup>2</sup> p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> Gabler, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, p. 6.

ordination. Out of respect for the bishop, whom he loved deeply, he agreed to undergo such training and joined the school in December 1909. Under Canon Wigram and Canon Wood he studied the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, Church History, Apologetics and History of Religions.

He did not fit into the life of the Divinity School. His private devotions required long periods of time for prayer and meditation and these were not possible in the school. His lofty ideal of service for Christ at real personal sacrifice did not appeal to his fellow students and they were very critical of him.

C. F. Andrews thus tells the story of Sundar Singh's life in St. John's Divinity School :

“ One day, a student, who had been a ring-leader in this resentful treatment, saw Sundar apart under a tree, sitting alone, and went up quite close to him without being noticed by him. To his great surprise, he found that Sundar was in tears, pouring out his heart to God in earnest supplication on behalf of this very student who had thus come near. He was praying that anything which he himself might have done amiss might be forgiven, and that true love might be established between them.

“ The student, when he heard this prayer, was so overcome that he discovered himself to Sundar on the spot and asked his forgiveness, and they became close friends. This devoted companion of Sundar's at the Divinity School is still living and working in the Punjab. His ministry in the Church has owed its depth and power to his conversion at Lahore.

“ Whenever it was possible to do so, I used to visit Sundar Singh in his room at Lahore during his time at the Divinity School. For I felt, from the first time that I met him there, that he was very unhappy. Fortunately, my University duties called me often to Lahore at that period, and I would make a point of going round to see him in order to give him good cheer. He seemed to me like some bird of the forest, beating its wings in vain against the bars of a cage. For the joyous, open freedom at Kotgarh, with the clear sky overhead and the solitude of the hills round about, had been left behind.

“ Fortunately, the bishop himself, as well as the Sadhu, soon discovered the strange mistake that was being made ; and it was corrected before it became too late. For a question arose whether, if he were ordained, he would be able to preach freely before any Christian congregation and also receive the sacrament with them. The bishop felt definitely that if he were ordained for work in his own diocese, this would strictly limit his ministry to the Anglican Communion.

“ Such a narrow, unlooked-for decision from the bishop, whom he loved, came as a great shock to Sundar. He had never even thought of such restrictions before. Now that he was faced with this

alternative, he at once realised that to be constrained in such a manner would not be in keeping with his vocation as a Christian Sadhu. It also appeared to him not to be in accordance with the universal character of Christ's teaching.

"So in the end, after much prayer and earnest communion with God, he decided to remain unfettered by any ecclesiastical bonds, and he observed this principle of spiritual freedom to the very end."<sup>1</sup>

Andrews gives another glimpse of that period in the life of Sundar Singh. "During the time when he lived a retired life of study in the Divinity School at Lahore, young men, Christian and non-Christian, used to come to him for spiritual help and counsel; and though at that time he was extremely reticent and not altogether happy concerning the course he had chosen, the silent influence of his example made its own deep impression."<sup>2</sup>

Sundar Singh left the Divinity School in July 1910, having spent less than eight months there.

At Geneva in 1922 he said in answer to a question: "I studied theology in a Theological Seminary. I learnt many useful and interesting things no doubt, but they were not of much spiritual profit. There were discussions about sects, about Jesus Christ and many other interesting things, but I found the reality, the spirit of all these things, only at the Master's Feet. When I spent hours at His Feet in prayer, then I found enlightenment, and God taught me so many things that I cannot express them even in my own language. Sit at the Master's Feet in prayer; it is the greatest Theological College in this world. We know *about* theology, but He is the source of theology itself. He explains in a few seconds a truth that has taken years to understand. Whatever I have learnt has been learnt only at His Feet. Not only learning, but life, I have found at His Feet in prayer."

Modern theological study requires a considerable understanding of the historical conditions under which the Bible was written and also a knowledge of its original languages. Church History and Historical Theology involve the study of many books. At the same time professors and students in Theological Colleges would do well to arrange for plenty of time for prayer and meditation. In our modern Theological Colleges not enough time is allowed for private devotions. The desire to complete heavy syllabuses of study in a prescribed period absorbs the attention of the teachers as well as the taught. Sundar Singh is right when he sounds a note of warning against the crowded courses of intellectual study in our theological institutions today.

<sup>1</sup> C. F. Andrews, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, pp. 93-95.

<sup>2</sup> pp. 120, 121.

## CHAPTER 3

### IN TIBET

1912-1913

WE have considerable material for an estimate of Sundar Singh's work on the Himalayas after the year 1912. Dr. E. M. Wherry, the American Presbyterian missionary who had taken great personal interest in Sundar Singh from his early years, edited an Urdu Christian paper called *Nur Afshan*, published every week from Ludhiana in the Punjab. He invited Sundar Singh to send accounts of his work from time to time, and when other people sent reports of his work they were also published.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of Sundar's letters in *Nur Afshan* was to awaken in its readers a keen interest in the work of preaching the Gospel on the Himalayas and in Tibet. Such evangelistic work involved many hardships from climate, robbers, steep narrow roads, and persecution in the native states and in Tibet. Sundar Singh felt strongly that information about this work should be given so that people might wake up to its need. He was anxious that even if they could not go to the Himalayas and preach the Gospel, they should pray for the work there.

It should be remembered that Sundar Singh used the word "Tibet" in a popular sense. He meant by it the country in which the Tibetan language was spoken and where Lamaism was prevalent, Lamaism being a corrupt form of Buddhism. There was Tibet proper and there was the border of Tibet, which had once belonged to Tibet but which since 1841 had severed its connection with Tibet and had come under the overlordship of the British. The common people in India did not make any distinction between Tibet proper with its own government in Lhasa and the border of Tibet, which was politically a part of the British Empire. This was because the people, the culture, the language, the religion

<sup>1</sup>A complete set of the *Nur Afshan* volumes in Urdu is kept in the library of Forman Christian College in Lahore. The quotations in this book are taken from the English translation of the *Nur Afshan* letters from Sundar Singh, now available in the Central Library in Zurich.

and the manners and customs were all the same, in spite of the difference in political affiliation. The Moravian Mission had dedicated itself to work in Tibet, but its most important mission stations such as Kyelang, Poo and Leh were on the border of Tibet. This border territory was rugged and pathless. The risks and dangers for a messenger of the Gospel on the border of Tibet were in no way less than the dangers in Tibet proper, which was officially closed to Christianity. Professor Francke, who went on an expedition through Spiti on the border of Tibet in the year 1909, reported that one of the Moravian Christians had been martyred at Spiti.<sup>1</sup>

In this and the three following chapters considerable extracts are given from *Nur Afshan*, for various reasons. The articles were written by Sundar Singh himself. He sought to be accurate and truthful in all that he wrote. Some of his biographers have tended to exaggerate the supernatural element in his life. He himself was careful in narrating what he was quite sure were miraculous deliverances. We have, of course, to reckon with possible errors in printing and in translation. The letters in *Nur Afshan* may be regarded as being more accurate than even the accounts found in his addresses. We know too well the mistakes which people make in reporting addresses, particularly when a person speaks rapidly as Sundar Singh was apt to do when he warmed up to his subject.

The *Nur Afshan* letters are of special importance as they were written immediately after the events which they described. Man's memory plays many tricks. As between Sundar Singh's narratives of events in his life told by himself some years after their occurrence and the accounts given in *Nur Afshan*, the latter accounts may be considered more authoritative, as they were written while the events described in them were still quite fresh in his memory.

Some of the letters in *Nur Afshan* were written by eye-witnesses. As far as possible, I have quoted only the accounts given by men who themselves had seen and described the events. There is no reason to suspect that their accounts were incorrect or false. Many of them were signed and the names of the places where the writers lived were also given. There was every possibility of contemporary readers calling in question the identity of the writers or the correctness of the information which they gave, if there was any suspicion of falsehood.

Sundar Singh was no explorer like Sven Hedin. He was not interested in geographical expeditions. He carried with him no apparatus for making scholarly researches. He was a simple preacher of the Gospel who travelled about, mostly by himself, carrying only a Bible and a blanket and depending upon people for even his

<sup>1</sup> Heiler, *Apostel Oder Betruger?* pp. 189, 190.

daily food. The information which he gave in these letters about the parts of the Himalayas which he visited must be judged from this point of view. They contained many facts which were gathered by an intelligent observer of men and things, with a view to stirring the interests of his readers.<sup>1</sup> In the year 1918 he visited South India and wrote some letters to *Nur Afshan* describing his work here. These letters are generally trustworthy in the account which they gave of his own work as well as of the Christian Church in South India.

After 1912 Sundar Singh planned to spend some months every year working on the Himalayas and the rest of the year preaching on the plains. The letters in *Nur Afshan* give very detailed reports about his ministry on the Himalayas, but not about his work on the plains. This must have been because he was anxious to stir up in people a desire to spread the Christian message in the difficult lands of the Himalayas. People in India were familiar with the needs and opportunities of Christian work on the plains, and it was not necessary to give them information about the work which they already more or less knew. But it was necessary to educate them about the challenging missionary situation on the Himalayas, of which they were not clearly aware. When reading the *Nur Afshan* letters we need to remember that information about Sundar Singh's work on the plains is thus very scanty for several years and that there are many gaps which at this distance of time it is difficult to fill. It should be added, however, that his little Urdu book of travel entitled *A Collection of Incidents* (1915) gives brief notes on all the important places in which he worked between 1905 and 1915, both on the Himalayas and on the plains of India. It is only after the year 1917 that reports of his work on the plains of India begin to be abundant.

*Nur Afshan* of April 19, 1912, published a letter from T. Nasib Ali, one of Sundar's helpers, giving a report of Sundar Singh's work in Tibet under the heading, "The Meeting of a Dear Friend":

"Sundar Singh left Kotgarh for Poo and after stopping for some time at Rampur reached Poo on the 9th March of the current year. We were very pleased to meet him . . .

"Sundar Singh and I wanted to go to Shipke (in Tibet), which is two stages from here. But when we reached Namgya, we came to know that the road to Shipke<sup>2</sup> was blocked with snow and that we could not go there. We, therefore, went to Tashigang, where a Head Lama resides . . .

"On the way to Tashigang we had to cross the river Sutlej by

<sup>1</sup> I may also add that where it has been possible for me to check his information I have found it reliable.—A. J. A.

<sup>2</sup> Shipke is 15,400 feet up.

means of a straw shaft which was rather a dangerous device.<sup>1</sup> The shaft was woven with rope made of grass. I thought perhaps Sundar Singh would hesitate to cross the river by means of that straw shaft, but he proved to be possessed of much courage and crossed the river with great ease long before I crossed it. After crossing the river we had to walk for about five miles of precipitous ascent, which was really very troublesome. Besides, the wind was so chilly that our hands and face became as cold as ice and we were unable to speak even a single word to each other. Poor Sundar Singh's hands were also swollen on account of the intense cold and he felt pain in them for several days after the journey. But I admire his courage. It is certainly very dangerous for an Indian to pass through such a cold place.

“ We reached Tashigang<sup>2</sup> safely in the evening. The Kushak (Head Lama) made all necessary arrangements for our comfort. Next day, the Kushak sent for us to meet him in his prayer cell. As he was then spending his days in retreat and the shrine in which we met him was dark, we could only talk, but could not see each other's face. The Kushak put some questions relating to worldly and religious matters which were duly replied to by Sundar Singh in detail. The Kushak very gladly heard all that Sundar Singh said to him and expressed his agreement with him in his views.”

After this long conversation the Kushak invited the people to come. When they assembled, Sundar Singh gave an address to them on the Christian religion. With Ali's interpretation, the address lasted for three hours.

The same day Sundar Singh and Ali left for Poo. On Sunday (March 17), Sundar Singh was asked to preach again in Poo, which he did.

A writer in *Moravian Missions*, August 1912, gave another account of Sundar Singh's visit to Poo in March 1912: “ In March we had a visit from a Christian Evangelist from India, named Sundar Singh, who came as far as Poo on a preaching tour . . . .

“ I believe this personal testimony made a deep impression on his hearers. The testimony, whether by word or by daily life, of Christian natives won from Buddhism or Hinduism, carries more weight than that of the European missionary, who is a Christian ' because his grandfather and grandmother were Christians ', as the Tibetans here say of their own people as Buddhists. Therefore, dear friends, help us to pray that God will soon raise up more helpers for our work from amongst the Tibetan themselves !”

<sup>1</sup> As it was likely to sway to and fro and to make one feel giddy.

<sup>2</sup> Tashigang is about 215 miles from Simla and belongs to Tibet proper.



The Rev. H. Kunick of the Moravian Mission, who was working at Poo at the time of Sundar's visit, wrote on April 24, 1925, to the Secretary of his Missionary Society giving his estimate of Sundar Singh, based on his contacts with him at Poo in 1912. This estimate is well worth quoting :

" Sundar Singh is a deep, sincere Christian who lives in continuous communion with our Saviour. He is an Asiatic, not a European. This one ought never to forget when judging him. The spiritual life of an Asiatic is not just simply the same as that of a European. In his spiritual life the Asiatic sees, hears, feels, expects, experiences, believes, hopes, loves and suffers differently from the European. What we consider imagination is reality for him. What appears to be reality for us is for him often imagination.

" To believe, see and experience belong together for him necessarily. What our Lord during His life on earth did to sinners, He can and will and must do even today for humanity . . . God's omnipotence, love and care as well as all the promises of our Saviour are taken literally by the Asiatics . . . It is difficult for the Asiatics to understand that we Europeans, though we are so thorough in other matters, do not take literally the Word of God in our day-to-day life as well as in the life of the nation, nor live it out literally as Sundar Singh does when calling himself publicly a Christian. This, for instance, is the simple secret of Gandhiji's power and influence in India. That man is a more sincere Christian than thousands in Europe. Sundar Singh is yet another, who connects the name with its action and lives it out . . . Therefore it is my opinion that there is not much point in exploring psychologically the spiritual life of Sundar Singh and trying to prove anything. Most of such proofs will always miss the mark."<sup>1</sup>

Sundar Singh left Poo again on March 18, 1912, and went to Kanum.<sup>2</sup>

" I went on alone by another route, preaching as I went, and came to the monastery of a celebrated Lama. He was the preceptor of the Tashi Lama, who is one degree below the Dalai Lama . . .

" I asked the Head Lama if there were in his monastery any book on the life of Christ, because a few years back a Russian named Notevitch had written that he had received a book from one of their Buddhist temple, in which it was stated that Jesus had been to Tibet. He replied : ' That is altogether a mistake. There is no such book in any of our libraries. Certainly it is true that a few hundred years ago great preachers came here and converted one of our kings to Christianity, but after his death his successor

<sup>1</sup> F. Heiler, *Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*, pp. 101, 102.

<sup>2</sup> An account of his visit to Kanum and other places is found in the little Urdu book called *A Collection of Incidents* (pp. 6-9), quoted here, written by Sundar Singh three years later.

banished the Christians from the country and from that time until now Christians have no permission to come here.'

"After this I visited several other places, where the people opposed me very much and ordered me to leave. 'Otherwise the same treatment,' they said, 'will be given to you as was meted out to Kartar Singh. When he refused to leave, we killed him.' On hearing this account I was confounded, because before this no one had heard anything of this unknown martyr. Now I desire to write what they told me about this martyr and which I afterwards myself confirmed.

"This young man was the son of Sundar Harnam Singh of Patiala. When his father heard that he was about to become a Christian, he made every possible effort to prevent it . . . . But Kartar Singh replied : 'It will never be possible for me to forsake my Lord.'

"Upon this his father ordered him to put off all his clothes and to leave the house and to renounce all connection with him from that time, that is to say, in the month of December and at night-time. So he took off his clothes and laid them at his father's feet and said to his father : 'I am not ashamed today to divest myself of these clothes, because the righteousness of Jesus Christ has covered all my nakedness and sin.' And then, according to his father's order, he left the house, praying as he did so. For two or three days he lived in the forest, though he was tormented with hunger and cold, but his heart was full of peace . . .

"On the third day he went to a certain person and doing laborious work for him was able to purchase for himself a turban and a coat, and then, adopting the style of a Sadhu, he went to Tibet to preach the Gospel of the crucified Christ . . . On the way he was baptized, and studying day and night he learnt the Tibetan language. Afterwards, preaching as he went, he reached the Tibetan town of Tashigang and preached there for the space of three months.

"All the people became his enemies . . . . On one occasion, when the people realized that he would not of himself go away, they bundled him up in a cloth and in turn bearing him upon their shoulder took him outside their district and left him there, but in a few days' time he arrived back again. Then the Lama pronounced the sentence of death against him. On hearing this Kartar Singh said : 'You may do what you wish to me, but I shall not leave this place, because the love of my Lord for me and my brotherly love to Him constrain me to offer to shed my blood even for your sakes, in order that you may believe in the truth and escape destruction . . . .'

"After this they conveyed him to a hill which was the place of execution. As they were ascending the hill he said to them : 'I

shall not now descend from this place, but after three days I shall rise up to heaven to my dear Lord.' Arriving on the hill they sewed him up in the skin of a yak (Tibetan ox) and laid him, thus sewn up, in the sun. As the sun shone on it, the hide gradually shrank and tightened and for three days this faithful servant was subjected to this misery, singing songs of praise and praying for the welfare of his enemies. Seeing him so joyful under such distressing circumstances, they were astonished. Some of them said : ' He must be possessed with the spirit of one of the gods.' On the fourth day, when the time of his liberation from suffering and entry into eternal rest had come, he asked for permission to put out one hand, that he might write some final words. Accordingly they released one hand and put a pencil in it. And on one of the pages of his Gospel, which is still in the possession of the Lama's clerk, he wrote some lines of poetry.

" Then, addressing the people, he said : ' Are you standing to see the death of a Christian ? Come and gaze attentively, that not a Christian but death itself dies here. Oh Lord ! into thy hands I commit my spirit, because it is thine.' Saying this, he entered into eternal rest with the Lord, and left us an example . . . .

" On one occasion when on Patiala station I was speaking about this witness, I saw a venerable man who wept bitterly, and afterwards on enquiry I learned that he was the father of that Kartar Singh. Weeping he said : ' Ha, alas ! I knew not that he was such a devout and Christian son, or I should not have treated him so badly.' Therefore the result of his becoming a Christian and of his martyrdom was this, that his father is a secret Christian, and of those among whom he was martyred several have become Christians."<sup>1</sup>

This story of Kartar Singh made a deep impression on Sundar Singh and he told it over and over again in his addresses.

From his letter in *Nur Afshan* of April 19, 1912, we gather some further particulars about this tour : " I had a mind to go up to Lhasa : but I had to give up the idea, because foreigners have no permission to enter that part of the country. In the second place, I was not acquainted with the language of the place. I had, therefore, to come back.

" After preaching in several places *en route*, I reached Kotgarh in the beginning of April. If God so pleases, I hope to go to Tibet again, but after I have learnt the Tibetan language and obtained the necessary permission from the Tibet Government."

Sundar Singh's little Urdu book *A Collection of Incidents* gives us a brief summary of his work for the next few months. Unfor-

<sup>1</sup> For other examples of Tibetan cruelty, see P. Gabler, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, pp. 250, 251.

tunately the notes in this book are rather scrappy and there are few dates. But they indicate how busy he was, travelling incessantly from place to place preaching the Gospel.

In Nahan, Sundar Singh met the Rev. T. E. Riddle of the New Zealand Presbyterian Mission. In later years they became great friends. Mr. Riddle has thus described their first meeting :

“ In the hot weather of 1912 I spent some months in a pretty little town in one of the hill states that lie between Simla and the plains. I had only recently come to India and was deep in the initial difficulties of the language. One day some of the Christians there brought to our worship service a tall young man wearing a long black robe, and having over his shoulder a light cotton blanket and in his hand a small dumpy edition of the New Testament in Urdu. They introduced him to me with great respect as Sundar Singh. They were thrilled at having him with them. He addressed the little group.

“ Though I had not previously heard of him, and his rapid Urdu was beyond me, I was convinced of his sincerity, and in the many intimate contacts that I have had with him during the next seventeen years I never had cause to change that first impression of his sincerity, truth and humbleness, or of the power of his pleasing personality. As the years went by, he grew in world experience and spiritual power, but it was always a wonder to him why God had given him that high calling of witnessing before kings and nations, and of sending out to the world his written messages, translated into the tongues of many people. More than all he was humbly thankful to God for those visions of the unseen world, which were so indelibly imprinted on his memory that he was ever after able to tell in clearcut words the things he had seen and the messages he had heard.”<sup>1</sup>

In his Urdu book of travels Sundar Singh continues his narrative.

“ . . . I went from Tehri by way of Gangotri to the Kailash Mountain. You have already heard something in reference to the Christian Maharishi (great sage) whom I accidentally met here. I had not the slightest conception that anyone could live in so bleak a place.

“ As I was going in the direction of the Lake Manasarovar, on the way I saw a stone cross which was set upon a rock. Afterwards I understood from this venerable sage that when the Nestorian Christians came to preach in Tibet, they had set up that cross here. When I saw this banner of victory in that lonely place, my heart danced with amazing joy and I had the desire to see

<sup>1</sup> *The United Church Review*, March 1946.

something more, but when I had wandered all around I was descending the hill with disappointment. Through slipping on the ice I fell down in front of a cave and was surprised to see a venerable man seated there with closed eyes. There was no cloth upon his body, his hair and nails had grown very long. At first on seeing him I was afraid, but when he opened his brilliant eyes and signed to me to be seated, my heart was comforted with the thought : He is not a man to be feared, but he is a true Rishi.

“ He said : ‘ Before we begin to converse together it will be well for us to pray to God. ’ Then raising a book in which the Greek language was written on leather leaves, he began to read. As he was reading, I understood it to be the fifth chapter of St. Matthew’s Gospel. Now was my joy inexpressible. It was a mysterious thing that there should be a Christian in such a place. I requested him to tell me about himself.

“ He said : ‘ My birth was in Alexandria (Egypt). When I was thirty years of age, Jarnos, the nephew of St. Francis Xavier, baptized me . . . . Up to my seventy-fifth year I preached in the whole world. I spoke twenty-one languages well. When I knew that I could no longer travel about, I gradually made my way to this place. I have been living here for two hundred and nine years.

“ ‘ God has committed to me the ministry of prayer, that I should pray for different places in turn. As the coming of the Christ is imminent, I shall remain alive until His coming and not only myself, but numbers of Christians now alive, who with their own eyes will see the Lord coming on the clouds. At that we too, in the same manner as Enoch and Elijah, shall be caught up to heaven. And at the time of our exaltation immediately our bodies will become glorious and then together we shall reign with Christ in that Kingdom that shall have no end. For a thousand years Christ will reign visibly on earth and His throne will be on that place where the Lord, though crucified, gained the victory over Satan and death for us, and for a thousand years Satan shall be bound and after that shall be released for three and a half years. Following that there will be the resurrection and judgment of sinners, when those who have not believed in Christ and also those who believed but did not act according to His will will be cast for ever into Gehenna, while for us true servants there shall be a new heaven and a new earth in which we shall reign for ever and ever. This earth and this heaven shall be destroyed. We ought to serve Him with all our heart and soul, so that we may also share in His eternal glory.’

“ His words made such a wonderful impression on my heart I could not describe the joy I felt. I only desired to remain with him ever afterwards, but alas! I did not get his permission to remain longer than twenty-four hours, though I still meet with him in

spirit, because he wanders in spirit throughout the whole world. When I doubted about this matter in my heart, then he told me of things personal to myself and also things in relation to others, from which I was convinced that truly in spirit he moved to and fro on the earth. And he also said he dwelt in Christ with those leaders and saints who have passed away from this world. They are not distant from us, they desire to assume bodily form and speak with us and to meet with their relatives and give them good news, to the effect that they are in a state of rest such as the world has never imagined and never will ; but God does not grant them permission to assume bodily form, because He desires that His servants should rightly, and by means of prayer, obtain blessings from Himself . . .

“ Afterwards more conversation followed, but the relation of all the matters would not be profitable for all ; therefore this much is enough. It is hoped that when some friends go with me to meet with him a complete and detailed account may be written, along with a picture of the venerable saint.

“ Inhabited dwellings begin at a distance of about eighty miles from where the Maharishi lives. His food consists of various forest roots, which are exceedingly strength-giving. He also gave me one of these to eat, but I could not digest it and immediately vomited it. Afterwards he gave me some advice and dismissed me with prayer. I then came on to Pauri by way of Gangotri, but I feared to tell about him, because he did not tell me his name. When I repeatedly enquired of him he replied : ‘ Name pertains now to “ I ” and now not “ I ” but “ Christ ” lives in me, therefore my name is Christian. ’ Then I received guidance that people would be profited by my talking about him and from that time I began to relate his story. One more amazing thing he mentioned to me and prophetically said that within a short time a wonderful occurrence would happen to me which would greatly strengthen my faith.”<sup>1</sup>

Sundar Singh’s book (p. 13) proceeds : “ A Wonderful Occurrence. The happening which was prophesied by the Maharishi was as follows : When, after leaving Kailash, I reached the inhabited part and enquired from the people there the way to the nearest village, they, out of enmity, seeing I was a Christian, directed me to a dangerous forest path ; as I was quite ignorant I followed their direction and went that way.

“ As I travelled night came on, but no village appeared and the sun was setting when I arrived at the bank of a river. From every side the noise of wild animals came to my ears. I tried to cross the

<sup>1</sup> Sundar Singh claimed that he met the Maharishi of Kailash three different times—in 1912, 1916 and 1917. The account just quoted is of his meeting the Maharishi in 1912. See chapter 6 for his accounts of the meetings in 1916 and 1917, and my own critical estimate of his narratives about the Maharishi.—A. J. A.

river but could not do so and at length sat down in despair, feeling that things boded ill for me that day and that the end of my life was at hand. My eyes filled with tears.

“ Just then, when I raised my eyes and glanced across the river, I saw a man sitting warming himself by a fire. He said, ‘ Do not be troubled. I am coming to help you.’ I was very glad to see him as he rose and came to me, and I was amazed to see how unhesitatingly and fearlessly he entered the swiftly flowing river and came out. He said to me : ‘ Sit on my shoulder and do not fear.’ So lifting me, he very gently carried me across. The surprising thing to me was that while I could not get even myself across, yet he, bearing such a burden, came through without anxiety. I concluded : ‘ As he is a resident of this place he is practised in crossing, and now sitting with him I will preach the Gospel to him and will also render my thanks to him.’

“ But when I turned and looked back, immediately both the fire and the man disappeared : and there were no bounds to my awe, wondering what this was. Then I remembered the words of the venerable one that ‘ a wonderful experience will come to you ’, and my heart was filled with gladness and with gratitude to God . . . According to the saying of the Rishi I received great strengthening through this help from the invisible world. ”

It was probably after Sundar Singh's first visit to the Maharishi in 1912 that a deliverance from a well in Tibet took place. The earliest and the most reliable account we have was given by Sundar Singh in 1918 to Mrs. Parker, who narrated it fully in her book *Sadhu Sundar Singh : Called of God* (pp. 35, 36). The account is as follows :

“ At a town called Rasar he was arrested and arraigned before the Head Lama on the charge of entering the country and preaching the gospel of Christ. He was found guilty, and amidst a crowd of evil-disposed persons he was led away to the place of execution. The two favourite forms of capital punishment are being sewn up in a wet yak skin and put out in the sun until death ends the torment, or being cast into the depths of a dry well, the top being firmly fastened over the head of the culprit. The latter was chosen for the Sadhu.

“ Arrived at the place, he was stripped of his clothes and cast into the dark depths of this ghastly charnel-house with such violence that his right arm was injured. Many others had gone down this same well before him never to return, and he alighted on a mass of human bones and rotting flesh. Any death seemed preferable to this. Wherever he laid his hands they met putrid flesh, while the odour almost poisoned him. In the words of his Saviour he cried, ‘ Why hast Thou forsaken me ? ’

“ Day passed into night, making no change in the darkness of this awful place and bringing no relief by sleep. Without food or even water the hours grew into days, and Sundar felt he could not last much longer. On the third night, just when he had been crying to God in prayer, he heard a grating sound overhead. Someone was opening the locked lid of his dismal prison. He heard the key turned and the rattle of the iron covering as it was drawn away. Then a voice reached him from the top of the well, telling him to take hold of the rope that was being let down for his rescue. As the rope reached him he grasped it with all his remaining strength, and was strongly but gently pulled up from the evil place into the fresh air above.

“ When he arrived at the top of the well the lid was drawn over again and locked. When he looked round, his deliverer was nowhere to be seen, but the pain in his arm was gone, and the clean air filled him with new life. All that the Sadhu felt able to do was to praise God for his wonderful deliverance, and when morning came he struggled back to the town, where he rested in the *Sarai* (rest house) until he was able to start preaching again. Back in the city at his old work again was cause for a great commotion. The news was quickly taken to the Lama that the man they all thought dead was well and preaching again.

“ The Sadhu was again arrested and brought to the judgement-seat of the Lama, and being questioned as to what happened he told the story of his marvellous escape. The Lama was greatly angered, declaring that someone must have secured the key and gone to his rescue, but when search was made for the key and it was found on his own girdle, he was speechless with amazement and fear. He then ordered Sundar to leave the city and get away as far as possible, lest his powerful God should bring some untold disaster upon himself and his people. ”

One ought to add that the critics of Sundar Singh have pointed out that, for various reasons, they cannot accept the authenticity of this event.<sup>1</sup> There are no eye-witnesses. It has not been possible to identify any place in Tibet by the name of Rasar. Sundar Singh gives no indication of the date when the event took place. There are many discrepancies in his reports. Over against these facts we need to give weight to the honesty of Sundar Singh, to which those who have known him for many years and who have come into intimate personal contact with him bear unwavering and constant testimony. And he told this story often in his addresses to show that God does deliver His servants from suffering and death.

<sup>1</sup> Oskar Pfister, *Die Legende Sundar Singhs*, pp. 89-97, and Paul Gabler, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, pp. 131-133.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE FAST

1913

EARLY in 1913 Sundar Singh went to Rishikesh, via Hardwar, to carry out his long-cherished desire of having a fast for forty days in imitation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rishikesh lies between Hardwar and Dehra Dun. Not more than two hours' walk from Rishikesh there is a forest known as Tapoban—the forest of ascetics. In this place there are crowds of Hindu ascetics from all over India performing various kinds of austerities.

Beyond Tapoban there is another forest known as Kajliban. Close to it flows the Ganges, which has been making its mighty way through the Himalayas. The forest in Kajliban is so thick that few people go there. Only those who seek complete seclusion resort to Kajliban. Sundar Singh was always anxious to have privacy for his prayers, so he went to this part of the forest and began his fast. The only people who could see him would be the bamboo cutters who would penetrate even thick jungle for their work. In such dense jungle wild animals would prowl about. But Sundar Singh was never afraid to go into places where there were wild beasts.<sup>1</sup>

Sundar Singh made a record in his New Testament <sup>2</sup> of the day on which he began his fast. He also kept near him forty small stones, one of which he expected to throw away every day to keep track of time. But he became weaker and weaker every day and after several days some bamboo cutters saw him lying down too feeble to move. They put him on his blanket and, carrying him with a bamboo pole, brought him to Rishikesh. The Sadhus there came to know from his name in the New Testament that he was a Christian. They put him on a train and sent him to Dehra Dun.

<sup>1</sup> F. Heiler, *Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*, pp. 177-179.

<sup>2</sup> This New Testament has been lost.

In the neighbourhood of the Dehra Dun railway station some Christians of the village of Annfield saw him and from his name in the New Testament recognized that he was the same man who had visited their village during the previous year. They decided to take him to their village in a cart. Apparently he was so changed that they could not identify him before seeing his name in the book. He held that the presence of the people from Annfield near the railway station at that time was the work of God. He was so weak that he was not able to speak, though he knew what was going on.

In Annfield he was taken to the parsonage of the Rev. Y. Dharamjit, who was away on leave. But his servant and adopted son Bansi were in the house and undertook the responsibility of nursing Sundar Singh.

Later,<sup>1</sup> Dr. Stanley Jones furnished some particulars of Sundar Singh's recovery from the physical effects of the fast. I was recently in Gorakhpur when I had a satisfactory conversation with Dharamjit Singh and his servant. The information which I received from him and his servant seemed very genuine. Dharamjit is an impartial man, with a feeling of responsibility, and on certain points is very clear. This is his story :

"He was on holiday in Basharatpur, near Gorakhpur. His servant wrote from Annfield that Sundar Singh had come in a very weak condition and asked for instruction. Dharamjit told him to take care of him until he returned. Sundar Singh had been in Kajliban and had fasted. He had then been brought to Rishikesh by some woodcutters who had found him in a thoroughly weakened condition. They handed him over to a non-Christian Sadhu. Later he came in a cart to Annfield. When Dharamjit returned, he found Sundar Singh still very weak. No entry in a diary was made. There did not seem to be the least doubt that Sundar Singh was not sick but that he was weakened from fasting. No doubt about the whole story ever occurred to Dharamjit because the evidence lay before his eyes.

"When Dharamjit returned, Sundar Singh was being fed on milk and only after eight or ten days was he given any bread. The servant said that when Sundar Singh was brought in, he was so weak that a man had to hold him up. On the first day he could not speak ; only on the second day did he begin to speak. The servant first gave him milk, then soup and sago. He was not sick but only weak from fasting."<sup>2</sup>

In his little Urdu book about his evangelistic tours (p. 19) Sundar Singh has given a brief account of his spiritual experiences during the fast.

<sup>1</sup> On March 19, 1927.

<sup>2</sup> F. Heiler, *Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*, pp. 113, 114.

“ After several years of service I felt guided to go into some forest where, free from any kind of interruption, I could have a forty day’s fast and ask for blessing on the past work and power for the future. When I first commenced the fast, for several days I experienced great hardship. Afterwards it was not at all difficult.

“ But the blood dried up to such an extent that I altogether lost the power of sight and speech. I could hear nothing and by reason of weakness could not even turn myself. But certainly my intellectual powers were sharpened several times over, from which I gathered proof of the true fact that the soul is an entity that cannot cease to exist when the body dies, but goes on living. In that condition I experienced the Presence of God and the fullness of the Spirit, which cannot be expressed in words. In that condition too I had a vision of the Lord in a glorious form, from which I gained the conviction that now He would assuredly keep me alive to serve Him for some time.”

Sundar Singh described to Canon B. H. Streeter and to me at Oxford in 1920 his experiences during the fast, without referring to his printed travel diary or any other written record. The account of the fast which he gave at that time is found in our book, *The Sadhu* (pp. 24-29). The fast played such an important part in his spiritual life that I do not make any apology for quoting that report in full.

“ During the early stages of the fast there was a feeling of intense burning in his stomach on account of lack of food, but this soon passed away. In the course of the fast he saw Christ ; not, he says, as at his conversion, with his physical eyes, because they were now dim and could not see anything, but in a spiritual vision, with pierced hands, bleeding feet and radiant face. Throughout the whole period he felt in himself a remarkable enrichment of that sense of peace and happiness which has been his in a measure even since he became a Christian. Indeed, so great was this sense that he had no temptation whatever to give up the fast. As his physical powers became enfeebled he saw, or thought he saw, a lion or other wild animal and heard it growl ; the growl appeared to come from a distance, while the animal itself seemed to be near—hearing apparently being more quickly affected than sight.

“ The Sadhu asserts that the fast has left a permanent effect on his spiritual life. Certain doubts he had entertained were finally cleared up. Previously he had sometimes wondered whether his sense of peace and joy might somehow be ‘ a hidden power of his own life ’, welling up from within himself and not due to the Divine Presence. But during the fast, when his bodily powers were nil or almost nil, the peace increased considerably and became much stronger. This has convinced him that his peace is a heaven-born

peace and not the result of the natural operation of his human faculties. Another consequence of the fast was the conviction that the spirit was something different from the brain. He had been used to wonder what would become of his spirit, after the decay of his body. But since during the fast he found that as his body became weaker his spiritual faculties seemed to become more active and alert, he drew the inference that the spirit was something altogether apart from the brain. 'The brain was only the office where the spirit worked. The brain is like an organ and the spirit like the organist that plays on it. Two or three of the notes may go wrong and may produce no music. That does not, however, imply the absence of the organist.'

"The fast, he told us, also left a permanent influence on his character. Before I attempted the fast of forty days I was frequently assailed by temptations. When you write your book you ought to write about my weaknesses also. More especially when I was tired, I used to get annoyed when people came to talk to me and ask questions. I still feel this difficulty, but nothing like so much as before the fast. Indeed, I have been told by my friends that it is not noticeable, but even if they are right it is still a weakness which I do not like to have in my life. It has caused me much difficulty and doubt, but perhaps it is given me to keep me humble, like the thorn in the flesh, mentioned by St. Paul, which I sometimes think may have been the same thing. Or perhaps it is partly the result of still living in the body, but I wish it were not so. Before the fast, I suffered also from other temptations. When suffering from hunger and thirst I used to complain, and to ask why the Lord did not provide. He had told me not to take any money with me. If I had taken money I could have bought what I needed. Since the fast, however, when overtaken by physical hardship I say, 'It is my Father's will; perhaps I have done something to deserve it.'"

"Again, before the fast I was sometimes tempted to give up the life of a Sadhu with its hardships, to go back to the luxury of my father's house, to get married and live in comfort. Could I not be a good Christian and live a life of communion with God there also? But when I saw that, though it was no sin for others to live in comfort and have money and home, God's call for me was different; and the gift of ecstasy which he had given me is better than any home.'"

A careful comparison of these two reports, one written by Sundar Singh in 1915 two years after the fast and another given orally by him in 1920 seven years after, is illuminating. The spiritual experiences described in the two accounts are essentially the same. The report in 1915 is quite brief. The report in 1920 describes at some length the same experiences.

It is difficult to decide the exact length of the fast. The only two dates which are definite are January 19 when he gave an address in Indore and February 21<sup>1</sup> when he wrote a letter to Bishop Lefroy. According to his own itinerary as set out in the little Urdu book, he visited various places after being in Indore. If we calculate carefully the time required for these engagements the maximum duration of the fast could have been twenty-three days. I suggest that his movements were as follows :

January 19 and 20	Indore
January 21 and 22	Ujjain
January 23 and 24	Nimach, Bandi, etc.
January 25 and 26	Delhi
January 27	Reached Kajliban
January 28 to February 19	The fast for twenty-three days
February 20	Transported to Annfield
February 21	Wrote a letter from his bed to Bishop Lefroy

The above is a conjectural reconstruction of his possible engagements. \*We do not know what trains he took and how long he actually stayed in the places which he visited. For lack of such information, any statement which we may make about the duration of the fast is purely hypothetical.

On January 22 six telegrams were sent from a small station called Nimoda in Central India, on the main railway line between Bombay and Muttra. These telegrams said that Sundar Singh slept in Christ. They were signed "Smith". As far as we know the telegrams were despatched to Bishop Lefroy (Calcutta), Dr. E. M. Wherry (Ludhiana), Canon E. J. Sandys (Calcutta), Canon Wigram (Lahore) and Rev. J. Redman (Simla). The name of the sixth person to whom the telegram went has not been traced.

When these telegrams arrived, the friends of Sundar Singh were greatly perturbed by the sudden and startling news of his unexpected death. A memorial service was held in the Church of St. Thomas in Simla on February 23 and a subscription list was opened for putting up a tablet to his memory. Some articles appeared in newspapers and magazines giving an account of his life and bearing testimony to the great service he had rendered to the Christian Church in India.

In the Church Missionary Society *Gleaner* (London) of February 1913 Canon E. J. Sandys paid a glowing tribute to Sundar

<sup>1</sup> I have in my possession a postcard written by Canon E. F. E. Wigram to the Rev. J. Redman in which he says: "Have you heard that Sundar Singh is alive after all? The Bishop of Calcutta has just sent me a letter of his written from Annfield, February 21."

Singh. He said : " On 23rd January, 1913, a brief telegram from Central India announced that 'Sundar Singh slept in Christ'. Behind that brief message there lay a story of deep pathos and of unfaltering heroism as would carry us back to the days of Apostolic Christianity. Yet it is a story enacted in this matter-of-fact twentieth century, and proves that the Saviour's touch has lost none of its ancient power."

After relating the story of his conversion and giving a brief account of his evangelistic work, Canon Sandys went on to say : " Calcutta seemed to him a hardened place where people's one thought was to make money. He said, ' I think God wants me to preach from one side of India to another.' This was actually fulfilled . . . His method was to preach for as many days as he felt called, being lodged and fed by Christian friends, he then went on to the next stage when they gave him the train fare.

" He was a perfect gentleman, refined and cultured in his manners, gentle and courteous, simple and unaffected. He had scarcely a loud enough voice for bazaar preaching, but this method did not seem to appeal to him. He would rather sit and discuss religion with a small group round him.

" From Bombay he wrote : ' I am sick, therefore I will go the day after to-morrow, on the 13th January, to stay with my friend in C.P. Then from there I will give you my address.' But the address never came, instead of it the brief telegram to say his preaching was done.

" Had he lived he would have been a power among his own people. While staying with us he read the life of St. Francis of Assisi, which he much enjoyed. He said, ' This is a good book.' It evidently appealed to him, for like Francis, his own soul had nothing coarse about it, he was one of Nature's true gentlemen and the refinement and gentleness of his character was brought out by his conversion to the Christian faith. India will be evangelized by her own sons and in their own way. May many more be raised up like Sundar Singh."

Sundar's explanation of the telegrams was this. When he was in Bombay he met a Roman Catholic medical man who gave his name as Dr. Swift. They travelled together on January 22 in the mail train going from Bombay to Muttra. Sundar Singh told Dr. Swift about his plan for observing a fast of forty days. Dr. Swift urged him not to undertake such a long fast and said that it would mean sure death. He also asked Sundar Singh for the addresses of his friends so that they could be informed if he died. Sundar Singh believed in the good intention of Dr. Swift and gave the addresses of six of his friends. Dr. Swift left the train at Nimoda station sent off the telegrams and caught the next train to Muttra,

In his German book, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, Pastor Gabler has investigated impartially and minutely (pp. 68-102) the authorship of the telegrams and has come to the conclusion that Sundar Singh had nothing whatsoever to do with them. He did not send them himself, nor did he arrange with anyone else to send them.

Dr. Stanley Jones made some careful enquiries about the length of the fast and came to the conclusion that, while it is wrong to say that he fasted for forty days, he certainly fasted for a long time. The account which the Rev. Y. Dharamjit and his servant gave to Dr. Jones of the period of convalescence clearly indicated that the fast must have lasted for many days.<sup>1</sup>

For some time after the fast Sundar Singh gave out that he had fasted for forty days. In later years he said that he fasted but did not know for how many days. Sundar Singh should certainly be blamed for saying that he had fasted for forty days when he had not fasted so long. He had the strong, though naive, belief that God had called him to undertake a fast of forty days and that therefore He would have helped him to complete it. In a letter to a friend, which Sundar Singh wrote from Annfield on March 3, 1913, and which was printed in *Nur Afshan* on March 14, Sundar Singh said: "As directed by God I kept a fast of forty days from which I derived much spiritual benefit. Exactly on the fortieth day by God's plan a few men came to the forest to cut bamboos and brought me from there. I had become very weak, but now I am able to walk again a little."

Sundar Singh's strong and compelling belief in the overruling Providence of God in all his actions led him to make statements which were not true, judged by ordinary standards of historical accuracy. He could have calculated the length of the fast by looking up the date on which he began his fast (as recorded in his New Testament which he had with him at Annfield) and reckoning how many days had passed before he broke it. In his spiritual enthusiasm he does not seem to have thought of this simple and obvious method.

As soon as Sundar Singh felt strong enough to travel, he left Annfield for further evangelistic work. The fast had been a momentous event in his spiritual life. He resolved to serve the Lord Jesus Christ with renewed vigour. He could never be inactive for long. If for any reason he had to take rest, he reduced this time to the barest possible minimum and started to work as soon as ever he could.

He left Annfield on March 11, 1913, and went to Nahan, where he met the Rev. T. E. Riddle again. Mr. Riddle says: "On March

<sup>1</sup> F. Heiler, *Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*, p. 114.

16, 1913, I was still in Nahan when Sundar Singh, looking pale and worn in his long black robe, came in to see me. I noted in my diary on that day : ' Sundar Singh again arrived : now going to the Tibet border.' Enemies of the Sadhu have not been slow to assert that he himself sent the telegrams relating to his death ; that he never fasted at all ; and that he went straight to Simla in January. My diary entry, which is supported by the Christians in Nahan, goes a long way to disprove these malicious assertions."<sup>1</sup>

*The United Church Review*, July 1946.



CHAPTER 5  
IN THE HIMALAYAS

1913-1916

FOR the next fourteen months Sundar Singh was travelling and preaching. The end of May 1914 found him at the borders of Nepal. He writes in *Nur Afshan*, July 3, 1914 :

“ After many difficulties God opened a way for me to go to Nepal. From two places I tried to enter Nepal, but I was checked by the officers of the state, because they do not allow any man to enter without a passport ; and for a Christian to obtain a passport is impossible, and especially for a preacher . . . . If any Christian came in he had to undergo rigorous imprisonment for six months . . . .<sup>1</sup>

“ On the way I passed many villages where people wholeheartedly heard the Word of God. In this territory the roads are awful. One is tired by ascents and descents and the crossing of streams. The 7th of June will always be in my memory—the fatigue of the journey, the extreme hunger and thirst, the heavy showers of rain and the ascent of seven miles. A terrible blast of wind threw me into a cave. O! praised be the Lord ; though I fell from such a height, I did not get any hurt at all . . . . The blast of wind turned into a wave of love, and the shower of rain into a shower of grace . . . . The different stages of the Crucifixion of Jesus came before me in a vision, that first of all He was awake in the Garden of Gethsemane the whole night ; secondly, He was hungry and thirsty ; thirdly, due to lashes and the crown of thorns He was bleeding ; fourthly, besides all these troubles He had to lift up the Cross Himself. For these reasons He fell down when He was climbing Golgotha. My Cross is nothing before thine and, O dear Lord, by the unique love and grace of Thy Cross, I have received and will receive blessings . . . .

<sup>1</sup> The religious situation in Nepal today (1956) is quite different. This country has now opened its door, though in a limited way, to Christian work.

“ After this I went to another village. Many people gathered round me. First I thought they were planning to turn me out, but after a short time they all sat by me. Then I read out some passages to them from the Nepali Gospel and made their meaning clear in Hindi, because I can read and understand the Nepali language, but I am not well practised in conversation; and as Nepali resembles Hindi, they followed whatever was said.

“ The next day<sup>1</sup> starting from here I reached one of the largest towns of Nepal, named Ilam. Here a Nepali army is stationed. The day I reached Ilam was a special day in which the bazaars were full, like a market day. I began preaching, standing in the bazaar before the post-office. The people gathered together in a large number, because it was a new and strange thing for them. Firstly, because before this no one had stood and preached in a bazaar; their religious teachers do so either in houses or in temples. Secondly, they were confused to hear about another incarnation who died and then rose and will come again for judgment. Many people heard me attentively and I distributed the Gospels which were in the vernacular of Nepal. During this time the official got the news. He became very angry and asked who had given me permission to enter Nepal and preach. I said that I did not come by any one's orders or of my own accord . . . but I had been sent by Him who is the Officer of all Officers, Raja of all Rajas and Creator of you and me.

“ *Officer* : Why ?

“ *I* : Because God through Christ has called all nations to life eternal and when I came to know that Nepal is unaware of this fact, He ordered me to give you the Gospel. If you will not have faith in Him, a day will come when you will have to stand before Him, just as at this time I am standing before you, and the decree of eternal punishment will be laid upon you.

“ *Officer* : When that time comes it will be seen, but you must be put into jail just now and I will see how your Christ will come for your rescue.

“ *I* : I am not afraid of this imprisonment; if this had been my fear, I would never have come to preach . . . . Though you fasten my feet with a wooden hook” (in Nepal the majority of prisoners have their feet hooked by nails in a big plank and they cannot walk at all) “ I shall still be free. When that happens I will consider my feet not on wood but on rock which cannot be moved.

“ *Officer* : Be quiet and do not talk any more.

<sup>1</sup> The next day would be June 8, 1914.

"I: As long as I have got life in me and a tongue in my mouth I will not stop talking about my Christ. Leaving custody aside, I am ready to give my life.

*Officer* (to *Inspector*): There is no need for any more discussion; take him off and put him into custody.

"*Inspector*: Sir, by taking this infidel into custody we will pollute it.

"I was wondering very much that in Nepal even the prison house is thought holy. If that place is thought sacred, then why cannot the pious people who are in it be set free? Anyhow, after this the *Inspector* said that a man is thrown into prison that he may suffer there, but this Christian takes it to be a thing of pleasure and comfort, so it would be better if some other punishment were planned for him.

"*Officer*: It would be better if he were turned out from the territory, because if he be put into custody, it is just possible that by his teaching for six months other prisoners may become Christians, and separate arrangement is difficult.

"So all agreed on this point and they at once sent a sentinel to take me out of the boundary."

Though Sundar was forbidden to preach and ordered to be taken beyond the boundary, he returned immediately to Ilam and began preaching again.

Sundar Singh tells us in his Urdu book of travels (p. 25) that because of his persistence in preaching against the orders of the officials he was imprisoned and persecuted at Ilam. An account of this imprisonment and persecution may be given in his own words:

"When the people saw that I did not cease preaching, they seized me and threw me into prison. They took off all my clothes and fastened my hands and feet in a block of wood<sup>1</sup> and bringing a lot of leeches left them near to me; from outside they threw filth upon me and used bad language to me. For two or three hours I felt my sufferings very much indeed, but afterwards my Lord by His Holy Presence turned my prison into a paradise . . . . When I was singing, full of joy, many people came to the door to listen and I again began to preach. Then they released me. To such an extent had the leeches sucked my blood that on the following day I suffered with dizziness as I walked. Glory to God that He honoured me by letting me suffer for His name."

Sundar Singh continually used this event to illustrate the great truth that the Presence of Christ turns even suffering into joy. The experience of Heaven on earth at Ilam was regarded by him

<sup>1</sup> That is, he was put in the stocks.

as one of the highlights in his spiritual life. The account which I have quoted here comes from his own pen and was written in 1915, only a few months after the event. We may, therefore, regard it as less liable to the mistakes which the human memory may make than even his own later accounts.

There is no record at Ilam of the imprisonment. There are no eye-witnesses of the persecution. There are significant variations in the accounts given by Sundar. Also the dates given by him are not consistent. This incident has, therefore, been examined with minute care and some writers have come to the conclusion that it did not take place at all.<sup>1</sup>

According to Percy Landon, anyone who sought to convert the people of Nepal to Christianity, Islam or any other foreign religion was liable to imprisonment.<sup>2</sup> There is, therefore, nothing intrinsically impossible in the account of the imprisonment.

After carefully considering the relevant facts I suggest that the events connected with this visit to Nepal occurred in the following order. On June 7 he travelled to Ilam and had a mystical experience on the way when he was blown by a strong wind during a storm into a cave. He reached Ilam on June 8 and began preaching there. On account of his persistence in preaching a forbidden religion, he was put in the stocks and leeches were thrown quite close to him and some of them crawled on to his naked body. According to his own account, the imprisonment did not last for more than twenty-four hours. On the morning of June 9 he was released and returned to Darjeeling—a distance of about thirty miles—walking all the way. He reached Darjeeling sometime on June 10 and wrote on the same day a letter to the Rev. J. Redman,<sup>3</sup> who had baptized him. But in this letter he did not say anything about the imprisonment or persecution, he only summarized his conversation with the officer. Nor is there any account of the persecution in his letter to *Nur Afshan* published on July 3, 1914 (quoted above). A report of the persecution with leeches occurs for the first time in the Urdu book of travels written in 1915.

Ghum is near Darjeeling. Tharchin, to whose house in Ghum Sundar Singh returned, has stated that in the first or second week of June 1914 he saw on the back and thighs of Sundar Singh some sores to which he applied iodine. But he says also that Sundar Singh did not tell him anything about his hands and feet being put in the stocks or about his persecution with leeches.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All the essential facts connected with this controversy will be found in Gabler, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, pp. 154-161.

<sup>2</sup> Percy Landon, *Nepal*, Vol. II, p. 177.

<sup>3</sup> An extract from this letter has been sent to me by Mr. Redman's daughter.—A. J. A.

<sup>4</sup> F. Heiler, *Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*, p. 98.

When questioned in later years about this silence, Sundar Singh said that he did not want to create any sensation among his friends and others by accounts of the cruel treatment he had received at Ilam. He also thought that if he gave publicity to this incident and his British friends set on foot an enquiry in Government circles, as he was a British subject, any chance of his again entering Nepal, an independent state, would be completely gone. The Rev. T. E. Riddle writes that when some time later Sundar Singh stayed with the Rev. Russel Graham he saw the Sadhu's body "still pitted all over with the scars of the leeches."<sup>1</sup> Mr. P. Chenchiah writes: "Once I inspected Sundar Singh's hand out of curiosity. It was tender and soft like a girl's. While I was admiring it, he showed me his back scarred all over with marks of ill-treatment. He told me that in Nepal they put leeches on his back as punishment. This Sadhu with the hand of a maid—had a back of steel that could stand up to any torture."<sup>2</sup>

Thus Sundar Singh had two mystical experiences on two different dates—one on June 7 on the road to Ilam and the other in the prison at Ilam on June 8. He had a hazy memory for dates. In after-years he continually said that the experience in the prison at Ilam happened on June 7, 1915. The entry in a New Testament with the wrong date was probably made some time after the event. All this was clearly due to a lapse in his memory.

On June 17 Sundar again left Ghum to preach the Gospel in Sikkim. With the permission of the Secretary of the Finnish Mission, Tharchin accompanied him. On June 25 they reached Gantok, the capital of Sikkim.

From the letters written by Sundar Singh and Tharchin we know that they made persistent efforts to go beyond Gantok. They wanted to enter Tibet or at least to go further into Sikkim, as far as Lachen. Sundar Singh applied for the necessary permit and for a week he went daily to the police station to enquire whether it had come. The desire to work in Tibet was strong in him and he sought to enter Tibet through Sikkim, but after eight days of futile waiting he explained to Tharchin that perhaps it was not God's will that they should go farther and so they would do well to return. They reached Ghum on July 9.<sup>3</sup>

Tharchin has written a letter to me, dated December 2, 1949, confirming some of these events. This letter is important as coming from an eye-witness. He says, "In 1914 Sadhuji came to Darjeeling and he was with me. He went to Nepal and came back. Then we both tried to enter Tibet, via Sikkim, but had to come back and he returned to India."

<sup>1</sup> *The United Church Review*, May 1946.

<sup>2</sup> *The National Missionary Intelligencer*, September 1955.

<sup>3</sup> Gabler, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, p. 163.

After his strenuous tours he generally sought peace and rest at Kotgarh. From the reminiscences of Sundar Singh<sup>1</sup> which the Rev. G. Y. Martyn (of the Brotherhood of St. Peter in Bangalore) has sent me I gather that Sundar Singh spent about three months at Kotgarh at this time. Mr. Martyn writes :

“ In 1914 I joined St. Stephen’s College in Delhi and learnt much about Sadhu Sundar Singh through conversations and reports in the papers. A group of us . . . went to spend our summer holidays at Kotgarh from July to October 1914. Mr. Stokes’s property was about four miles higher than Kotgarh. Stokes with his wife had gone to America and left Sadhuji there to have general oversight . . .

“ The Sadhuji would come to the church in Kotgarh and would sometimes stay with us for a day and sometimes we would go to his place in the morning and return in the evening. We met about fifty times and had long talks with him. His sermons were inspiring and his parables from nature and from experience were illuminating. He was quite original in his interpretations of the Bible. We found him very humble and shy in recounting his experiences and his visions. His whole attitude was not one of boasting and he never made dogmatic statements. Mr. Alfred Zahir’s books (written later) made him out to be what he was not in our contact with him. He did really bad service unwittingly to Sadhu Sundar Singh.

“ Also we toured with him in the villages around a radius of ten miles and found the people testifying to some of the things mentioned in the books about him. Finally we were convinced of the truth of his statements by his sincerity and reliability.

“ About Sadhuji’s devotional habits : We knew he had long hours of meditation, both in the morning before he started the day’s work and in the evening before going to sleep. Also he had days of silence, sometimes for a day and on occasions for some days.”

Sundar Singh told the Rev. T. E. Riddle that his ecstatic experiences began about this time. “ One day at Kotgarh about 1914 he was in the woods praying for the boys of the school there. Suddenly his spiritual eyes were opened and he saw the glories of the spirit world. It was so overwhelming that he thought he must have died. Only gradually did he realize that it was a vision that he had seen. After that he had visions from time to time. Later on the visions came as often as ten or twelve times a month and he then had long talks with the beings of that world. The illustrations, teaching and expositions that he made use of in his addresses and books came mainly from the illumination which he received from those conversations.”

Mr. Riddle continues : “ I well remember the night when he first told me of his visions. He was staying with me in Kharar in the

<sup>1</sup> Dated April 26, 1951.

hot weather. For an hour and a half in the darkness we paced up and down in front of the house, while he poured out his wonderful tale. He became greatly excited as he recounted what he had seen and gradually his voice became louder and louder till it boomed out over the compound. There could be no question about the reality of the joy that the visions brought to him."<sup>1</sup>

After a time of rest at Kotgarh Sundar Singh returned for further evangelistic work in Nepal. We can follow his work with the help of his little book of travels. It must have been about this time (February 1915) that Sundar Singh wrote it at Kotgarh.

Since October 6, 1905, when he became a Sadhu, he had travelled widely in India, Afghanistan, Tibet, Kashmir, Garhwal, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Assam. He published in Urdu a brief account of these evangelistic tours under the very clumsy title, *A Collection of Incidents*. He said that he wrote this book in response to the request of his friends. It was dedicated to the Metropolitan of India: "With great respect and humility I present this poor offering to my gracious, kind patron and helper, the Most Reverend the Lord Bishop of Calcutta, Dr. J. J. Lefroy, Metropolitan of India and Ceylon." Bishop Lefroy had allowed him to carry on his evangelistic work in his own way though he had not completed his course in the Divinity School in Lahore. Sundar Singh was always deeply grateful for the sympathy and insight with which Bishop Lefroy treated him.

Sundar Singh complained that the printing of this Urdu book had been done most carelessly, several names of places and persons misspelt, some pages of the manuscript lost and a story which he himself had not written added to the book from the printer's own knowledge. Sundar Singh therefore refused to allow the republication of his little book. We do not know all the mistakes which were made in the press. The book, even with its mistakes, is a particularly valuable document for various reasons. It is the only record which gives us a consecutive, though brief, account of his work for the first ten years of his ministry. It shows us how incessantly he was engaged in preaching the Gospel and what difficulties and hardships he encountered in the course of this work. It describes in his own words many of his spiritual experiences, to which he referred constantly in his later years. It also gives us the stories of the martyrs which deeply impressed him, influenced his life and were frequently used as illustrations in his addresses.

From the end of May 1916 for a month Sundar Singh saw a good deal of Alfred Zahir, who, in due course, wrote several small books about him and helped to make his name widely known.

<sup>1</sup> *The United Church Review*, May 1946.

Alfred Zahir was a young man of twenty-two, who had completed his college education, and was in charge of a hostel for students attached to St. John's College in Agra. When he first met Sundar Singh in Agra, there arose within him, as he says, a burning desire to become personally acquainted with him. This wish was fulfilled at Kotgarh where Sundar Singh was taking rest in between his tours and where Zahir also went to spend the summer holidays. One day he saw the Sadhu as he sat and watched a hockey match between the school boys on the hills and his own boys. When he met the Sadhu, he was greatly attracted by him and received from him a deep impression of his simplicity, his zeal and his devotion. From that time on, he was with the Sadhu for some weeks and spent most of the time listening to him. He was so inspired by the Sadhu's spiritual experiences that he felt constrained to write a book about him and to get it published. At that time he was a quite inexperienced writer and felt that he was not qualified to undertake such a task, but he was certain that God would be with him and help him. At first Sundar Singh was not willing that he should write a book about him. But when Zahir told him that his purpose was to put before young men an ideal for them to strive after, Sundar Singh agreed. This was the origin of Zahir's first book about Sundar Singh, entitled *Shaida-i-Salib*. It was written in Urdu and many of the facts in it were supplied by the Sadhu himself. On his return to Agra, Zahir completed the manuscript but did not have the necessary means to publish it. A Christian friend and publisher, however, offered to bring out the book.

During the next three years Alfred Zahir published various little books in English about Sundar Singh, such as *A Lover of the Cross*, *The Apostle of the Bleeding Feet*, *Martyrs of India*, *Christ's Secret Disciples*, *Heaven and Hereafter*, *Saved to Serve* and *Soul Stirring Messages*. The critics of Sundar Singh have made a detailed study of these writings and have come to the conclusion that in course of time Zahir elaborated his stories more and more and embroidered them with fanciful details of his own invention. It is unfortunate that Sundar Singh's first biographer, in his youthful enthusiasm, gave undue prominence to the supernatural element in Sundar's life. The numerous extracts from Sundar's own letters in *Nur Afshan* given in this book will convince the reader that he himself did not attach such importance to the supernatural incidents which, he no doubt claimed, took place in his life. The accounts which he gives in *Nur Afshan* of his ministry in Tibet and on the Himalayas are, on the whole, quite restrained and responsible.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a careful study of Alfred Zahir's books about Sundar Singh, see Gabler's *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, pp. 1-9.



## CHAPTER 6

### THE MAHARISHI

1916-1917

SUNDAR SINGH travelled through the Himalayas in the spirit so well described by the Indian poet, Sri Aurobindo :

*“ With wind and the weather beating round me  
Up to the hill and the moorland I go.  
Who will come with me ? Who will climb with me ?  
Wade through the brook and tramp through the snow ?*

*Not in the petty circle of cities  
Cramped by your doors and your walls I dwell ;  
Over me God is blue in the welkin,  
Against me the wind and the storm rebel.*

*I sport with solitude here in my regions,  
Of misadventure have made me a friend.  
Who would live largely ? Who would live freely ?  
Here to the wind-swept uplands ascend.”<sup>1</sup>*

In his *Nur Afshan* letter of July 14, 1916, Sundar Singh bursts into praise of the surpassing beauty of Mount Kailash :

“ In the Hindu Shastras there is frequent mention of Kailash. In reality it is a wonderful place. The old Rishi also, impressed by its beauty, wished to settle in its neighbourhood. As the Bible was written in a hilly country, mountain scenery is often mentioned in it. For those who study the Bible a mountain is an interpreter of the highest quality. Take the verses : ‘ Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow ’ and ‘ As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee.’ Because the writer saw snow and springs, he was impressed and he prayed. He who has never seen

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo, poem entitled “ Invitation ”, *Collected Poems and Plays*, Vol. 1, p. 121.

natural white snow and springs of extremely transparent, sweet and cold water, how can he guess their greatness and pray, being of one voice with their Author?

“In order to understand the writings and speeches of philosophers and learned men it is necessary first to know their technical terms. But in order to understand God’s book, Nature, eyesight alone is sufficient. ‘Oh clever man, the leaves of trees which appear green to the eyes, are in reality the leaves of the book of God’s revelation.’ The powerful speech of rivers, brooks, springs, mountains, fruits and flowers melts even the hard-hearted, provided their ears are kept open. The whole of creation seems to be loudly praising God. On hearing this one begins to bemoan the condition of unfortunate mankind, that mute creation extols Him, laughing and with gratitude, but man, on whom is bestowed a tongue half a foot long, remains with his tongue tied. Oh man, sharp-tongued, you are eloquent in idle talk, but you are without speech in praise of your Creator and Lord. Woe, hundred times Woe!”

The letter continues :

“A Christian Maharishi lives here in a cave. When I told the people of my first unexpected visit<sup>1</sup> to that saint, some of them taking it for a story did not believe it. Many said that it was a vision or a dream. Then I asked many a gentleman to come with me and see. But it is regrettable that except Padre Williams no one else was ready. At last he was also prevented from coming. God has now bestowed on me another opportunity to visit this Maharishi.

“I found him exactly the same as on my first visit . . . . He described all my past life as clearly as if he had been with me every moment. One of my intimate friends, a missionary, said : ‘When you visit him again, recommend me to his prayers.’ When I made this request on his behalf, I was much ashamed to hear the saint say, ‘There is no need for your recommendation. I pray for everybody without being told, as my whole life is devoted to the ministry of prayer. Go and tell your friend the missionary that as long as he does not give up that sin . . . . I can never pray for him. Because if I do, then his sin will prevent an answer.’ I was greatly surprised to hear this. How did he come to know my friend’s internal state? On coming back I wrote the whole story to this friend. He was very upset and with tears repented of that sin, about which he had thought that, besides God and himself, no one else knew anything.

“That Rishi said : ‘When someone sins in secrecy, he thinks that no one sees him. But at that time besides God’s holy angels, there usually gather his dear relations’ spirits who have been taken from the earth. I see them with my own eyes. But they are not allowed

<sup>1</sup> In 1912.

to become manifest to the people as human bodies. Whenever they see anyone sinning, then they become restless and go away, for they can feel the very bad smell of sin. These very spirits and angels will be witnesses of their secret sins on the Day of Judgment. But the angels and saints always remain with those who are busy in the study of the Bible and in prayer. This is the communion of saints which was felt by the people of old. If in this world we remain busy with heart and soul in the service of God then at the time of death these holy ones, together with the angels, will come to welcome us where, with them, we shall always live near God.'

"After this there was still much more conversation. I have no time to write all the things which were said. At last he sent me away from there with his benediction. Now I am more certain of his wonderful Christian life than before. For whatever he told me, on coming back I found it all true. I asked him : 'How do you come to know the state of the world while living in this wild jungle?' He said, 'Because I wander in the spirit.' And he gave the following references about this from the Bible : 2 Kings 5 : 26 ; 1 Corinthians 5 : 3 ; 2 Corinthians 12 : 2 ; Colossians 2 : 5, etc.

"If any gentleman wants to visit this Christian saint, I am again prepared to go with him . . . ."

For many years Sundar Singh went to Kotgarh for rest in between his tours, as we have seen, particularly during the summer months. Some of his notes about Kotgarh are worth quoting :

*Nur Afshan, July 21, 1916*

"Kotgarh is a small town in the district of Simla, situated on the Tibet Road about fifty miles north of Simla. About seventy years ago God sent his servant here, a military officer, Mr. Gorton, by whose efforts the work of God began, and later on missionaries too have been at work. Nowadays the members of the church number about one hundred. In order to worship the Lord Christ, a beautiful church has been built ; with the voice of its bell rings out every morning at 8-30, the mountains in the neighbourhood echo.

"When I, preaching in the state of a fakir, came for the first time to Kotgarh on July 8, 1906, I met here Mr. S. E. Stokes. He said : 'What a beautiful thing it would be, if there were the hut of a Christian Sadhu who would serve here. Now God has sent you here. It is better that we work together.' I replied : 'My service is to preach while travelling. And my advice to you is this : Do not assume the state of a fakir, for it would be very difficult for you.' But he did not agree and in September 1906 he distributed all his goods and became a fakir after building two huts, one in a village and the other in the cave of a mountain. Then he did a tour with me in the mountains . . . .

“ Mr. Branch, Mr. Macmillan, Mr. Jacob and the Padre of Delhi, Mr. F. J. Western, also having given up their wealth, began to serve here, having accepted the life of a fakir. Then Swami Shri Dhar Tirath, who is a very learned Sadhu and was a Brahmin Sanyasi for forty-two years, but could not find the peace of his soul anywhere except in Jesus Christ, came here on May 31, 1909, and was baptized ; he wrote also a few books . . . Swami Isanand, who was first called Sankaranand, became a Christian ; he is also a well-educated Sadhu. Thus a group of Christian Sadhus was formed.

“ But as I had previously said to Mr. Stokes, ‘ It is difficult for you, Europeans, to lead the life of a fakir ; you had therefore better not adopt it,’ thus it happened. Every one of them went back, one after the other, to the place from which he had come. But as many Indians as joined that group, they all by the grace of God are still serving successfully in the same state . . . .

“ Letters from many gentlemen who want to serve in the manner of a Sadhu have been received. It is altogether useless to enquire from me. My reply to those gentlemen is that it is not an essential thing that they all should serve as Sadhus. There are ministries of many kinds and all are good. Therefore everyone should do what he knows as his calling from God.”

The Rev. G. Y. Martyn has sent me some further particulars about the group of Sadhus to whom Sundar Singh refers here :

“ I met my cousin Samuel Jacob at Karnal and talked with him about the Sadhu, by whom he had been deeply influenced. He was one of the dozen young people who wanted to go with Sadhuji to Tibet. They lived with him for a time at Kotgarh as a brotherhood, leading a life of prayer and meditation and looking after the sick on the Simla Hills. I remember him saying that there was strong opposition from the Christian missionaries to the life they lived and especially to the wandering tendencies of Sadhuji and that, while they longed for training in one place for a certain period of time, they did not find in the Sadhu the Guru they needed, as he was never long with them. Owing to lack of financial support, the group broke up and Samuel Jacob himself took up the wandering life of a Christian preacher in conventions and conferences.”

*Nur Afshan, July 28, 1916*

Dr. Bhansi Lal sent to the Editor a summary of a letter Sundar Singh received from his father urging him to marry and a copy of the letter which Sundar Singh wrote in reply :

Rampur, 1st July, 1916.

My dear Son, light of my eyes, comfort of my life, may you live long ! You have not replied to the message which I sent to

you through the tailor Dasundhi. Now I do not ask for your opinion but order you to marry soon. Does the Christian religion teach that you should not obey your parents? Can you not serve your Guru Christ after you are married? Think a little. Who will take care of the house and property? Will you efface the name of the family? If you agree to your betrothal today, I will give in your charge a sum of money the monthly interest of which will be about Rs. 300. Otherwise whatever stands in your name, don't hope for it.

Your affectionate father,  
SHER SINGH

The Swami received the letter here at Kotgarh which I, with his consent, send for publication in the paper *Nur Afshan* . . . .

Kotgarh, 18th July, 1916.

My dear father,

I am in due receipt of your loving letter. I am always obedient to you and ready to serve you heart and soul, but I cannot marry, because besides you I have my Heavenly Father, whom I must serve with all my mind and might. This is the ideal of my life. If I marry I will not be able to do my duty faithfully. Moreover, I have no desire for marriage.

Now comes the question of help and property, that they would be stopped. Do you think that when I became a Christian, I had any hope of getting them? If I had any ambition for them, would I have become a Christian? When you stopped your help, it was very kind of you; and now, when you have renewed it, it is very kind of you; and now if again you stop it, it would be very kind of you. You are wise and old. Whatever you think proper you may do, but having kept my hand on the plough I will not look back.

With kind regards,  
Your most obedient son,  
SUNDAR SINGH

Dr. Bhansi Lal added : " As Swami Sundar Singh is my fellow-countryman, from the time I came to Kotgarh as the doctor-in-charge of the C.M.S. hospital here, he usually consults me in any difficult matter. In regard to marriage I found him absolutely disgusted. I came to know thoroughly that he will never, never marry, not because he thinks the pure relation of matrimony bad, but because he takes it to be a great hindrance in the service which God has entrusted to him.

“ I respectfully request that Christian lady who wants to marry him kindly not to keep him back from the blessed service for which he has sacrificed his youth and for which service he has received special guidance from God. From his conversation it is clear that he thinks those letters in which there is mention of marriage, and those people who advise him to marry, are a hard trial to him. This is his prayer to God whenever such a thing reaches his ear : ‘ Oh God, while thou hast called me for thy service, why dost thou allow such a trial to come to me ? He gets great consolation from this thought : ‘ This is perhaps also to my benefit that God allows such a trial to come so that my youth may be fully examined, whether I have placed it solely at the feet of God, and so that, oh God, thou mayest use it as *thou* wishest.’ Those gentlemen who, every now and then, by letter or orally, press Bhai Sundar Singh to marry, are respectfully requested in future not to do so. Instead of this they should help him with their prayer. I write this with his permission.”

On July 14 Sundar Singh had written in *Nur Afshan* a brief account of his second visit to the Maharishi. Extracts from that account have already been given under that date. Probably at that time he was very busy with his preaching and had no leisure to write a longer account ; but two months later he sent quite a long report which was published in three instalments in *Nur Afshan* during the month of October. Here are some selections from that long account.

*Nur Afshan, October 6, 1916*

“ When I met the Christian hermit of Kailash a second time he told me many useful and secret things which no age or commentator has as yet discovered. I am only giving the thoughts of that great man and his answers to my questions, which if not profitable will not at least be without interest. I leave it to you to draw any conclusion.

“ *Maharishi* : I come to know all sorts of things through meeting great spirits of all kinds and great men of all ages. For with every true Christian there are generally, besides angels, also the spirits of holy men. And if through nearness to God and a life of prayer our spiritual eyes are opened, we can see them clearly, like the great men of old. Although we have never seen them before, yet we can recognize them at once. Peter, James and John had never seen Moses and Elijah, but when they saw them talking with Christ on the mountain, they recognized them at once without being told by anyone (Matthew 17 : 3). Similarly our dear ones and relatives and forefathers, who have died in Christ, often come to us. But on account of our blindness we cannot see them. God at certain times sends these people to help us instead of the angels, because they can help us and sympathize with us better

than the angels, as like us they have experienced all the states of life in the world ; as Christ has also experienced them, having been himself in our position (Hebrews 2 : 18). Therefore God sends such people for our help and guidance and they stay with us as our companions (Zechariah 3 : 3-8)."

*Nur Afshan, October 13, 1916*

"*Sundar Singh* : Are human souls eternal like God or are they born ? If they are not from the beginning, how can they be eternal ? For that which has a beginning also has an end, and if the souls are born, are they born with the body or before it ?

"*Maharishi* : Human souls are not eternal. Because if with regard to time they are immortal like God, then they must necessarily also be unlimited like God with regard to knowledge and power. But the human soul is limited in knowledge and power. Consequently it is also limited with regard to time. With regard to existence it is assuredly born. But according to God's knowledge and intention, it is without beginning ; as God said to Jeremiah : ' Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee ' (Jeremiah 1 : 5) ; i.e. he was not born, but he was present in God's knowledge and intention, and from the same knowledge and intention, by which non-existence became existence. He ordained : Let there be, and it was so. It was difficult to bring non-existence into existence. But by an order to change existence into eternity is not difficult. Souls are not born before the bodies, but God forms the spirit of man with the body in the womb of the mother (Zechariah 12 : 1).

" From among the many sayings of the Maharishi only these few are written on his behalf . . . And that which is found to be contrary to God's Holy Book, leave it aside. This is also my aim in writing these things, that the people may visit this Christian hermit so that every one, according to his view-point, may ask him questions. I am ready to accompany those who wish to go. I can also say this : that you may or may not agree with his thoughts, but if you go, you will come back having acquired a special blessing, because he has passed all those spiritual stages which are yet before us."

*Nur Afshan, October 27, 1916*

" I have received many letters from gentlemen whom I have never had an opportunity to meet. They have heard confused accounts about the Christian Maharishi, some from *Nur Afshan* and most from here and there and on account of misunderstanding they have taken them to be something else. Now as I have little leisure from my work for God, it is exceedingly difficult to reply to them individually. So I hope that the respectable objectors will excuse me if I quickly tell them through this newspaper a few things.

“ As I have previously written, some of my friends think that this is only a dream or spiritual meditation in which an old man came and talked, but that in reality there is no such man. Well : every man has his idea according to his capacity, so let it be as he thinks it to be. If the people think that it is true and believe it, our salvation does not depend on it, and if they do not believe it, there is no loss, for our salvation is from God who at every time and everywhere is with us. I do not like knocking heads together like rams. Say whatever you like. Your servant will listen to it silently and will continue praying for your welfare. . . .

“ I was coming back from Tibet side and had no idea of a Rishi at all. While descending from the mountain, my foot slipped and I fell heavily in front of a cave. The mark of the wound is even now visible on my foot. And when I looked up, having raised my eyes, I saw this Maharishi sitting in a cave.

“ He said to me : ‘ Through experience I found that there are plants of various kinds here which can be used as food and which are very invigorating. Besides this, the spiritual world was also opened to me. From that time the ministry of prayer was bestowed on me. Perhaps you will call this a waste of one’s life in a cave. But everyone should do according to his calling from God. We have no right to give a prejudiced opinion about someone else. I would even now gladly go for service among the people, but my body has acclimatized itself to this place. If I go away from here, the climate of some other place will not suit me and I shall not be able to render the least service. . . .

“ ‘ Assuredly there are plants here which can increase or decrease the strength of the body. When there are poisonous plants which can end the life of man in fifteen minutes, why should there not be plants which preserve the heat of the body and its strength for a long time in such a cold place? Doubt arises from the fact that people have so far not tried out these plants and are not aware of their peculiarity and effect. Now the time has come when we, leaving this tabernacle and being clothed upon (2 Corinthians 5), may always live with the Lord in heaven. Therefore it is necessary that we should remain awake and pray.’

“ Many gentlemen have been wandering frequently in the mountains, but have not found any Rishi. I was wandering in these hills since 1905, but never met any such Rishi. But in the summer season of 1912 I met him by chance. I am not the only one who is a witness for the existence of this Maharishi but, as I found at the time of my second visit, there are hundreds of witnesses, as the Maharishiji is a special spiritual member of the secret group of the beloved of Christ. Only wait a while. With the appearance of this extraordinary group of servants of the Bible, you will get complete proof not of the imaginary but of



the real existence of this Maharishiji. If you want the proof at once, then accompany your servant. It is a journey of two months only.

“ People will accept neither this nor that. In this way the higher critics tried to prove that Jacob, Abraham, Jonah and the different personalities of the Bible were fictitious beings. One learned man went so far as to call Christ also an imaginary being. Well, when the people are ready to say such unfounded and false things about the Lord, what power has an insignificant man like me ? It is not to be wondered at if the people say that the Rishi of Kailash is merely the result of deception or a dream or an imaginary idol created by thoughts in a solitary place. Believe it or not, he is a reality. I told you whatever I have seen. It is a matter of pride for us that among the followers of our faith there are such great men and lovers of God who help us by joining our ministry through prayer . . . .”

During the later months of 1916 Sundar Singh travelled extensively on the plains of India. We have no information about this strenuous tour.

*Nur Afshan, January 26, 1917*

“ I have travelled through fifty-two towns of India to preach the good news, having received invitations from them, and even now I have invitations to many other towns. I hope, if it is God's will, to complete this tour by the end of March, and in April I shall start on my tour to the hills.

“ Those who want to proceed to Kailash are informed two months in advance, so that they may fully equip themselves. I am sure that any one who goes will not come back without getting the blessing of the Maharishi of Kailash. If not more, this journey will at least not be devoid of benefit and interest. Moreover, it depends upon one's state of mind and faith. If a few Hindus, Muhammadans and Englishmen make themselves ready, it will be good, so that the doubts of all sorts of men may be removed and all may receive spiritual benefit.

“ Gentlemen who want to take some luggage should take coolies along with them from here, because it is difficult to get coolies on the Kailash side, and there will not be found any shop there. For those who go towards Badrinath it is easy . . . . but for Kailash there is neither a road nor any arrangement for food. One has to cross streams and valleys while going. One has to face hardships and difficulties of every kind. I inform you of this beforehand, so that no gentleman may be annoyed with me on the way, saying : ‘ Why did you not tell us before ? ’ Those who want to go or want to ask anything more can correspond with me care of Mr. A. Zahir, B.A., St. John's Christian Hostel, Agra.”

Several people had called in question Sundar Singh's accounts of his visits to Mount Kailash, particularly of his interviews with the Maharishi there. He therefore announced (as we have just seen) that he was prepared to take with him any one who wished to accompany him on his next journey to Mount Kailash.

Four young men joined him for this purpose. They were A. S. Judson, a High School teacher at Unao, J. R. Clifford, an Assistant Tahsildar (subordinate Revenue Official) from Kanpur District, Qudrat Masih from Ambala (who afterwards became a Muslim), and B. Mohan Lal, a Quaker from Bhilsa. All of them were Indians or Anglo-Indians. Bishop Warne of the Methodist Episcopal Church gave them his blessing in Lucknow before they started on their adventurous journey. They left Lucknow on March 31, 1917, the Saturday before Palm Sunday, and proceeded to Dehra Dun. Sundar Singh was attending a conference at Saharanpur and they waited for him at Dehra Dun to join them ; on Wednesday, April 4, they all left on foot for Mussoorie.

J. R. Clifford decided to return home as he found even the hardship of this walk to Mussoorie too much for him. The Rev. W. M. Branch wrote to Sundar Singh not to take Qudrat Masih and he stayed behind at Mussoorie. Sundar Singh left Mussoorie on Good Friday with the two companions who were left.

They chose the route via Gangotri. His critics have attacked him for taking these men along this route, on the ground that it was a specially difficult one. But this was an ordinary route used by many pilgrims and travellers and we need not impute any blame to Sundar Singh for the choice of this particular route. Judson himself has said clearly, refuting the criticism : " We were anxious to visit Gangotri and as many other interesting places as possible." The hardships on the way were many. Heavy rain and hailstorms added to their troubles. Sundar Singh's companions were not accustomed to such difficulties and fell ill with dysentery and fever. They could barely proceed on the journey. After some days they found that the rest of the way was covered with deep snow. No alternative was left for the travellers but to abandon that route.

Judson confessed that he was so disappointed that in a rage he threw his things at Sundar Singh. But he admitted that though he lost his temper, Sundar Singh himself did not do so. No sign of anger or temper was seen on his face and he did not attempt to retaliate. Judson decided that being angry with Sundar Singh was of no use.

The three travellers then went to Tehri and Sundar Singh sought to persuade Judson to go with him on a different route to Tibet. If they decided to take that route, Judson would have to give up

wearing his European clothes and put on some simple Indian dress with a turban, so as to look like an Indian traveller. Judson had brought such clothes with him but had lost them on the way. So he decided to give up his journey to Mount Kailash and to return with Mohan Lal to Mussoorie. Sundar Singh went on his way alone in a different direction. This must have been about April 14, ten days after they left Dehra Dun together.<sup>1</sup>

We next hear of Sundar Singh at Dangoli during the third week of April on his way to Tibet by the route from Almora. He met at Dangoli the Rev. Yunas Singh, who was working in connection with the London Missionary Society. Yunas Singh had himself travelled to Tibet in 1916 and written a book in Hindi about Tibet.<sup>2</sup> Yunas Singh had a conversation with Sundar about his earlier visit to Tibet. He showed Sundar a map of Tibet and asked him to point out the route he had followed and the places he had visited. Sundar did this correctly and Yunas Singh was convinced that Sundar was indeed acquainted with the way to Tibet.<sup>3</sup>

*Nur Afshan, July 6, 1917*

"I shall now write about the road leading to Kailash. It so happened one day that I had a very severe attack of fever and I was unable to walk.<sup>4</sup> I could find no place to halt. A very severe cold wind was blowing, so much so that my blood seemed to be freezing in the veins. I had no friend or companion with me. In that condition I had to traverse seven long miles of precipitous ascent, while suffering from hunger and thirst. I had no medicine with me. After offering my prayers, I began to ascend the hill. This exertion caused so much perspiration that all my clothes became wet. When I reached my destination, I found that I was all right. The fever had left me when I perspired profusely. Had I lain down on a bed and begun to take medicines, God knows for how many days it would have troubled me.

"One day in the course of my travels, I reached a village called Ganai. There was a very big fair there that day. I saw some people causing wounds on the body of a he-buffalo by means of a clasp-knife, and then filling those wounds (which were bleeding profusely) with powdered red chillies. The poor animal, which suffered from severe pain, was running to and fro madly, with his tongue drawn out. But those cruel wild people seemed to rejoice over it. They considered that their sins would be forgiven by their doing so.

<sup>1</sup> P. Gabler, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, pp. 136, 137.

<sup>2</sup> *Kailash Darshan*, North Indian Christian Tract & Book Society, Allahabad.

<sup>3</sup> F. Heiler, *Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*, p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> It is not clear where this incident took place; probably on the road from Almora to Kailash.

“When the buffalo fell down on the ground exhausted, the people beat him to death with their sticks; and his blood was offered to their deity. When I saw this, I had the image of our Lord Christ before my eyes. It is not by means of the blood of sheep and goats but by means of the Blood of the only Son of God that we get salvation. I had very good opportunities for preaching the Bible to the people at this fair. . . .

“When I heard for the first time that wild goats, wild dogs and wild horses were generally found in the hills and in Tibet, I was very much surprised. But when I went towards Askot this time, I came to know that wild human beings were also found there in abundance. The forest of Askot is about twenty miles from Almora. I went to those people, preaching the Holy Bible *en route*.

“These people look wild even in their appearance. They wear only one *langoti* (a small piece of cloth round the waist). They make utensils of wood and sell them. Some of them have improved and have begun to wear clothes. But if you proceed farther on and visit the denser jungle, you will come across strange things. I was walking alone. I then saw a man and a woman and their four children coming out of a cave and running at a very fast speed, even faster than a horse. They had long hair on their bodies and their complexion was dark. They were all quite naked. They were afraid to come near a habitation. They, therefore, lived miles away from villages. I then turned back, took a half-wild man with me to serve as an interpreter and returned to the jungle again.

“He took me inside a cave where some wild men and women and children were sitting. When they saw me they began to make preparations for running away and they were about to flee when my half-wild companion, known as Kokra, told them that they should not be afraid of me and that I had not gone there to seize them. On going nearer, I saw that they had spread grass in the cave and that their beddings and coverings were also of grass. They lived on wild fruits, herbs and the roots of trees. They had long and flat teeth. They are not afraid so much of wild beasts as of human beings. They consider wild animals as their associates and neighbours. Sometimes wild beasts (like tigers) kill these wild human beings for food and sometimes these human beings kill the wild animals for their food.

“Commissioner Ramsay<sup>1</sup> made great efforts for their improvement some years ago. Two of these wild human beings were caught and taken to a village. They could not count more than two. Among them a man can marry his own sister or daughter and no ceremony is performed on the occasion of the marriage. All their habits resemble those of wild beasts. When a child is born, it is not washed but its own mother licks it. On seeing me wearing clothes,

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps of the Salvation Army.

one of them laughed loudly and said to Kokra that I was a very strange man who had wound a cloth round his body and enquired from him whether I did not find it troublesome. . . .

“ These wild men live in the mountains of Askot in the Kumaon district. They are called *Raots* or *Rajas*. They have not got the power of discretion but they have some idea of God. They do not, however, believe in the existence of the living God. They generally fix a beautiful stone at some height and worship it as God. Atheists do not believe in the existence of God. They may say what they like, but there is ample proof of the existence of God in man, whether he is illiterate or literate. If it be not so, how could these wild human beings know that there exists a God who must be worshipped? . . . .

“ I had a mind to stop amongst these wild human beings for a few days, but as they were afraid of coming near me, my further stay there was useless. Some of those whom I met in this jungle have now left their caves through fear of me and gone to live in other caves.”

*Nur Afshan, July 13, 1917*

“ Mount Kailash is situated in Western Tibet. Some may think that this Kailash is the same Kailash which is near Chini and where there is a hospital maintained by the Salvation Army. I may let you know that the real Kailash is as far from Chini as from Dehra Dun, that is to say, about three hundred miles. . . . The highest peak of Kailash, which is 21,850 feet above sea-level, always remains covered with snow. Nature has made this peak in the form of a temple having a Cross thereon. It is a very beautiful place. That is the reason why it was selected by the Rishi for the purpose of prayer. The people of India and Tibet consider Kailash as the abode of the gods and call it Paradise. . . .

“ The ways of God are very inscrutable. Although the place is so very cold, there are several springs of hot water close by. Some people would think it impossible that there could exist springs of hot water in such a cold place. In the same way some people would think it impossible that the Maharishi could remain in such a cold place in winter. But the fact is, the springs of hot water and the Maharishi are there, and if a person does not believe he had better go and see for himself. . . .

“ Kailash is about a week’s journey from Pithoragarh. It may be a month’s journey for others but it is only a week’s journey for me, because I can easily walk one hundred miles in three days. Pithoragarh lies at a distance of about sixty-three miles from the nearest railway station. Adventurous people have travelled to the North Pole and the South : it is therefore not difficult for such people to visit Kailash.”

*Nur Afshan, July 27, 1917*

“While travelling in the vicinity of Kailash, I happened to meet a Lama called Fangche. He had come for the double purpose of performing the pilgrimage to Kailash and seeing a certain *Garpan* (officer). I spoke to him about the Maharishi. He at first gave me an evasive answer and said that there were many Lama Rishis in the locality, but that he had not been able to find out the cell of any one of them. I told him that I knew the situation of the cell of one of the Rishis, and requested him to accompany me there. I insisted upon Lama Fangche doing so and at last he consented.

“We walked by the east of Kailash via Gorikond and after crossing a stream ascended a hill. The Lama took some meat and some *Sattu* to serve as a meal. While walking in the snow, we saw some wonderful scenery. But our lips became stiff on account of the intense cold and we could not speak a single word.

“On the evening of the following day we reached our destination. We found the Maharishi reading a very old manuscript in Greek bound in leather. Fangche was rather astonished to look at the Swami. But that holy personage looked at him lovingly and made a hint to us to sit down. We both salaamed him respectfully and sat down.

“Conversation then began. I wish to mention here word by word everything which the Maharishi said to us in reply to our questions. After reading three chapters of the Bible from St. John he offered a prayer. Then he said :

“Now tell us, Sundar, how you happened to come here. Judson, Clifford, Qudrat Masih of Lucknow and Mohan Lal of Bhilsa who came here have gone back. It does not matter if I am physically living at a great distance. But our dear Lord is always near us all. It is better for them to pray and to obtain His grace. I will also add my prayers to theirs and beg that their service may bear fruit. Tell them to give up the desire of getting higher pay and to keep themselves engaged in the service of the Lord ; if they do so they will get everything. (Romans 8 : 32.)

“*Sundar*. You know full well the purpose of my coming here. You also know who went back owing to troubles on the way. I will convey your message to them. This Lama has come with me to pay his respects to you.

“*Lama*. Salaam. Are not you Lama Nausang who disappeared and whose whereabouts have not since been known ? A great row has now begun in your *Gumpa* (temple). Will you not go there personally and give the people the necessary instructions ?

“*Maharishi*. Lama Nausang, who was a recluse for a short time, is dead. The *Gumpa*, to which you have just referred, is not mine.

I am a very humble servant of the Lord Christ. He has been pleased to allot this cell to me. So I am spending my life here in prayer. It is not, however, my business to stop quarrels. This world is a place of strife. These disputes will not cease until Satan, who is at the root of all these quarrels, is seized and imprisoned. The time is now drawing near when Satan shall be hurled down headlong in the bottomless pit of perdition. I would have most gladly taken upon myself the task of giving necessary instructions to the people of the *Gumpa* referred to by you and of preaching the Holy Bible to the world at large, but I am not now physically fit to undertake that duty, nor have I God's permission to go out anywhere and give up the service which I am rendering to Him here by means of prayer.

“*Lama*. Is this the same Christ whose advent was announced by Kartar Singh, a Punjabi preacher, for which act of his he was killed at Tashigang, by the order of the Lama of that place? Is that very Christ the Lord Christ of your good self and of Sundar Singh or is he a different Christ?

“*Maharishi*. This is the same Christ who is the Lord of all and shall remain so for ever. He is not my Lord alone or the Lord of Kartar Singh or Sundar Singh alone, but he is your Lord also and the Giver of Salvation to the whole world; Acts 4 : 12. Kartar Singh, whom your people caused to be killed, is now the recipient of the Lord's blessings. He generally comes to me with other holy saints and prays in the following terms : ‘O Lord, how long will you not take vengeance for my murder? How long will the spilling of my blood not bear fruit?’ It would be good if you study the Bible supplied to you by Sundar Singh when offering your prayers. If you find anything in it which you do not understand, then please come to me and I will give you the necessary explanation. You should have a strong faith in the Lord Christ because it is only by that means that you can obtain salvation.

“ (I then gave to the Maharishi a list of the persons who had requested him to pray for them. I have accordingly intimated all of them that I have done so.)

“*Maharishi*. The spirit of God is doing a very wonderful work these days openly and secretly; that is to say, the way is being prepared for the advent of our Lord. You need to know everything about the Secret Mission. After you left this place last year, some brother Christians, who represented this Mission, came here to see me but they did not consider it advisable to make mention of the interview to the public. I think it would, therefore, be good for me to give a brief history of this Mission for your information.

“ When our Lord Christ was born, three Magi, actuated by the force of Nature and guided in their journey by a certain star in the sky, proceeded to see Him. One of them was a Pandit of Benares,

named Vishwamitra. On his return he told the people that the Lord Christ, the Giver of Salvation, had come on earth. But the other Pandits and the public made a fool of him because according to their faith, the incarnation of Nishkalank (the Immaculate One) could take his birth only in India and nowhere else. Several years after this, Vishwamitra went to Palestine again. Our Lord Christ was then twenty-one years of age and had begun preaching the Bible.

“ This aged Pandit met the Lord Christ a second time near Bait-Ziya, prostrated himself before Him and kissed His feet. Christ, out of love for the old man, extended His hand and raised the Pandit up, and gave him the power of punishing evil spirits and doing miracles just as He had given to His other disciples. The followers of Christ who were Jews, finding that Vishwamitra belonged to a quite different race, looked upon him with contempt. When the Pandit found that he could not work with them, he severed his connection with them and began to preach the Bible separately. This Vishwamitra is the same prophet who turned out evil spirits in the name of Christ. The other disciples tried to keep him from doing so, but our Lord forbade them and asked them to live in harmony (Mark 9 : 38-40).

“ The Pandit then came back to India and began the work of preaching the Bible. The other Pandits of Benares, finding that he was preaching a new religion, became his bitter enemies and seeing an opportunity one night, they caught hold of him, tied his hands and feet with ropes and threw him into a river. The dead body of this true lover of Christ could not be recovered. The Pandit's disciples then began to teach Christianity secretly. About that very time, the apostle Thomas came to India after Christ had returned to the heavens. Then the disciples of Vishwamitra went to live with that apostle and gradually increased in number. In the second century A.D. they translated the Bible into Sanskrit. But some time after this they lost their zeal and vigour and became somewhat lazy, like the Roman Catholics in the Middle Ages. When missionaries like William Carey came to India, these men found that the teachings of the missionaries were the same as their own. Then they began to preach the Bible devotedly. The number of the followers of this creed has now swollen to several lakhs in India and more than one-half of the inhabitants of India have heard the preaching of the Bible by those persons. There are now about twenty-four thousand secret missionaries who are rendering service to the Lord, without receiving any remuneration. I am one of them. Service by means of prayer is my only business.

“ *Sundar Singh*. I do know this, because I have had several opportunities of meeting them and preaching the Bible along with them. There are, however, many people who have no faith in this



Mission. It is said that even several able and intelligent persons have no faith in this Mission.

“*Maharishi*. (smiling) This is not a new thing. Doubt is a common disease in this world. People of all grades are liable to this disease and shall remain so until the day of resurrection. I know that there are many people (except those who are proud of their knowledge and position) who do believe and derive benefit thereby. There is nothing strange if a few able persons do not believe in this Mission. If some learned and able persons do not believe in the existence of God, does it follow that there is no God at all? No, certainly not; you should never even think of such things. I know Dr. D. N. P. Dutta wrote in *Nur Afshan* last year that he thought some imaginary figure had spoken to Sundar Singh. Let them say what they like. You cannot suffer in the least by anyone's saying anything against you. You are only telling the people what you have seen or heard. You should go on with your work, without caring a bit even if anyone does not admit the correctness of what you are saying.”

Sundar Singh wrote some reports saying that he met the Maharishi of Kailash on three different occasions—1912, 1916 and 1917. There were several criticisms of these reports. We have seen what Sundar Singh's own replies were. This subject has aroused much controversy and it is really difficult to get at the exact truth. There are three possibilities :

1. Sundar Singh made up the whole story in order to stir the curiosity of people. We may eliminate this possibility in view of the many clear and unwavering testimonies to Sundar Singh's truthfulness, especially by those like Dr. E. E. Fife, the Rev. T. E. Riddle and the Rev. C. F. Andrews who knew him over a long period of years. Sundar Singh readily and consistently offered to lead people to see the Maharishi, and some persons actually started for the purpose, but none of them reached the Maharishi's cave or saw the Maharishi.

2. He may have seen the Maharishi of Kailash in the visions to which he was constantly subject. The main objection to this possibility is that in the visions which he saw there were certain common themes which were frequently perplexing him and on which he was continually seeking light from above. From his books, from his letters and from what he told his biographers in private we know that the subjects of resurrection, judgment, heaven and hell always exercised his mind and he fully believed that God gave him the necessary guidance in the visions which were granted to him. On the other hand, in the interviews which he had with the Maharishi such questions as the following were discussed :

Were there any human beings in the world before Adam was created? Who was Nod, to whose land Cain went when he left the

presence of the Lord (Genesis 4 : 14-16)? If Nod was one of the many sons and daughters born to Adam and Eve in their state of innocence, what proof is there for this explanation? What was the mark which the Lord set on Cain, lest any finding him should kill him? The Serpent made Adam and Eve sinners, having misled them (Genesis 3 : 1-5). But who incited the Serpent to do this?

These questions were answered in great detail by the Maharishi and the answers were printed in *Nur Afshan* of October 6 and 13, 1916. I have not quoted them in this book as I am sure they are not essential for an understanding of Sundar Singh. Questions like these never seem to have troubled him. We have no evidence whatever that he was perplexed by them and that he sought for light on them while in a state of ecstasy. The Chapter on ecstasy in *The Sadhu* book, Sundar Singh's own book *Visions of the Spiritual World* and his letters to his American friend Pastor Goddard amply prove that these questions about the early chapters of Genesis played no part in Sundar Singh's thinking.

3. I am inclined to accept the third possibility that there was a very old man engaged in prayer in one of the caves near the Kailash mountain.

The Rev. Yunas Singh of the London Missionary Society says that when he visited Tibet in 1916 he made investigations about the Maharishi, of whom Sundar Singh had told him. In Gianama, a market-place eighty miles from the Indian border and forty miles from Kailash, he heard from the Tibetan merchants there that numerous ascetics lived at Kailash in hidden caves and that a very, very old ascetic lived in the region of the snows. But they were not able to tell him exactly how old he was or to lead Yunas Singh to him.<sup>1</sup>

Rabindranath Tagore, the famous Indian poet, was asked by Miss Mary Dobson whether he had ever met the hermits in the Himalayas and he said to her, "No, but it is of common knowledge that they are there."<sup>2</sup>

The Maharishi, whom Sundar Singh met, claimed that he was three hundred years old. Sundar Singh accepted this claim uncritically and repeated it to many people. The Maharishi was also interested in certain problems of the Old Testament and gave his own answers. Sundar Singh included them in his reports in *Nur Afshan*. The Maharishi told him about a Secret Sanyasi Mission—that it had a well-knit organization, that it had a membership of twenty-four thousand Sadhus, many of them well educated and with social prestige, and that its beginnings were from the days of the Lord Jesus Christ while He was on this earth. Sundar Singh

<sup>1</sup> F. Heiler, *Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Una M. Sanders, *Mary Dobson*, p. 167.

believed these stories wholesale and retailed them far and wide. It is quite probable that Sundar Singh knew many Hindu Sadhus who were secret believers in Christ. But we have no evidence that they were an immense number or belong to a regular Order.

Readers who would like to know about the hermits living in the Himalayas, their habits, their thoughts, their aspirations, their struggles, should study *The Mountain of the Lord*, a pamphlet published by the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore.

A great many people became critical or curious about the Maharishi and asked Sundar Singh various questions about him. Sundar Singh sought to restrain all of them by saying that his mission in the world was to preach Christ and not to preach the Maharishi.

## CHAPTER 7

### IN WESTERN INDIA

1917

AFTER this preaching tour in the Himalayas, which included another visit to Tibet, Sundar Singh began a missionary journey in India in the autumn of 1917. He spent the month of December in Western India as part of this tour.

Fortunately we have full reports of his work there. Soon after the meetings some letters appeared in *The Cowley Evangelist*, the missionary periodical published in England by the Society of St. John the Evangelist. Father F. S. Playne wrote thus in *The Cowley Evangelist* of March 1918 :

“ A great event has been the visit to Poona of Sundar Singh, the Christian Sadhu. He spent Tuesday over here and came twice to the Mission House and in the evening preached to a large congregation in the Church compound in Hindustani, which Vincent David interpreted in a very feeling way. I found it somewhat of a strain to follow, not understanding the one language and with difficulty keeping pace with the other. The subject was Prayer. He is certainly a most wonderful and holy man, with a most serene expression of countenance. It is a great mark of sanctity, I feel, not to be moved by the idolizing of the people. He said many nice things about the work, I hear. ”

Sister Amy Sybilla wrote about him thus in the same number of *The Cowley Evangelist* :

“ He does not beg, but is dependent on charity; if he is given food he gladly accepts, and if he is not offered any food he goes without. So that he has often had to go fasting for many days, and it is his joy to suffer. He spends many hours in prayer, both in the afternoon and far into the night, interceding for his countrymen. He has been confirmed and read for Holy Orders, but when he realized that as a priest in connection with the English Church in India his ministrations would be limited he felt he could not be ordained.

“ The Indians are much impressed by his quiet life of prayer and asceticism, and his wonderful personality is a compelling power. He is one of the handsomest men I have seen, tall, well-built, and of a kindly bearing, with the manners of a polished gentleman—a wonderful combination of humility, meekness, gentleness and fiery zeal, and the light of purity and intense calm manifest in every feature. The people almost adore him, but one feels it is not his personal attractions that draw people, but the simplicity and sincerity of his life. One of our lads met him in Bombay, and wrote to his mother and said, ‘ His face is divine ’. Again and again one hears the people say, ‘ He looks like Christ ’ . . .

“ Our boys flocked to hear him speak in different parts of Poona before he came to us, and the feeling was tense the day he did come . . . He was very struck at the number of English women working in the Mission. He did not speak much, was business-like, quick, and observant during his round. He was much struck with the crèche, and blessed the babies. He remarked to Vincent David, who was escorting him. ‘ We do not know what these little children are thinking about, but they look straight up to God, and their upward glance is an act of thanksgiving ’ . . . He said he had not seen such care taken of the babies in other Missions and was sure this work called down blessings on the Mission. He was very impressed by the church ; when taken to the chapel of the Reserved Sacrament he genuflected at once, then stood up with his arms raised to heaven and said, ‘ This church shall stand till the Second Coming. ’ . . .

“ The boys rushed to get a blessing from him, and people hung round to have an opportunity of a word or a smile or a handshake with him. One of our girls remarked to a Sister, ‘ Yes, Sister, we have heard all this from you many times before, but to think that one of our people is speaking like that and praying like that, is wonderful. ’ . . .

“ His last day in Poona was spent in retreat, and it is said that he shut himself into his room from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., during which time not a morsel of food or a drop of water passed his lips. All unknown to him a photographer was called to take his photograph before he left Poona, and he was most unwilling to have it done. He is reported to have said : ‘ Why do you do this ? The dust will return to the dust. ’ But as everything had been arranged he reluctantly allowed it to be done.

“ The people asked him to stay here and work for our people, but he said, ‘ You have the people doing the work ; I am not needed here, ’ and on being told that he could influence the bad Christians, he said, ‘ No, that is for you to do. ’ To young enthusiasts who wish to give up everything and follow him on the impulse of the moment, he says, ‘ No, stay where you are, and do the work God has given you to do. ’”

In *The Cowley Evangelist* of January 1918 Father H. S. Nicholson wrote an article about Sundar Singh. The three comments on his life and work with which he closed the article are penetrating and well worth quoting in full.

“ 1. There is no doubt as to the influence that he exerts over both Christians and Hindus. He would appear to be the first Christian who has succeeded in living such a life for a period of twelve years. Now the publicity which is accorded to him might mean the bringing to nought his work. We will hope that such may not be the case. During these years he has been alone in this life, except for the brief space of time when some Europeans were with him ; so, should anything happen to him, the work might collapse and come to an end.

“ 2. Those of us who desire that the religious life should appeal to Indians are delighted to hear of this mendicant friar going about India preaching Christ. His influence cannot fail to be powerful, for to do such a thing is to do that which is clean contrary to the natural inclinations of Indians. To them such a mode of life is clearly supernatural. We also feel that this presentation of Christ by Sundar Singh has its dangers. He is apparently quite orthodox in his belief in Our Lord's divinity, and in the need of baptism. In the record of his life, there is no mention of his having received the Holy Communion, although that of course may be taken for granted by the writer of the book. It is, however, clear that his knowledge about the Sacraments and the Church is vague, for it is recorded in the book that Sundar Singh says that he belongs to no Christian body. It is difficult to imagine how the religious life can be surely established outside the sacramental system of the Church. Sundar Singh does not himself baptize, he hands over those who are moved by his teaching to the Missions. If this Christian ascetic becomes the power that he seems likely to become, it will mean that in India there will be a widespread dissemination of Christianity in an imperfect form. To Indians doctrine seems difficult to apprehend ; they are ready to accept any form of teaching, so long as it is not the definite teaching of the Catholic faith.

“ 3. Sundar Singh speaks of a secret society of Sadhus who worship Christ in secret assemblies. Many of them are said to have been formerly Hindu Sadhus. At present these Hindus do not openly confess Christ in baptism. The number of these Sadhus who are secret Christians is considerable. There is a fact in connection with the Indian census of 1911 in the Punjab which may be explained by the existence of this secret society. In the Punjab, at the last census, the number of Christians increased by more than 22 per cent ; and that in the face of an organized attempt on the part of Arya Samaj to get Christians to return themselves as

Hindus. The Christian Missions could not account for the increase, the numbers recorded being many more than they had any cognizance of in their Missions."

Mr. Vincent S. David, the young Indian Christian who acted as Sundar Singh's interpreter, wrote a long letter about Sundar's visit which was published in *The Cowley Evangelist* of December 1918. Here is part of the letter.<sup>1</sup>

"I never even dreamt that the Sadhu would call me. When Sundar Singh left Poona no doubt he had made a great impression on my mind, but after he left Poona I again began my usual course of study. I remember the day. It was Friday,<sup>2</sup> I was in the school, and the history lecture was going on, when a man brought in a telegram. When I opened it, to my great surprise, I found that it was from the Sadhu, saying that I should start at once for Kolhapur. That very night I started and reached Kolhapur the next day at about 9 a.m. . . .

"On Sunday morning we were taken to a village, about sixty miles distant, where there were a dozen Indian Christians. At 9 a.m. non-Christians, Marathas, Brahmins and all sorts of people began to gather when they learnt of the arrival of the Sadhu. There was an audience of about 300 men and women. Then the Sadhu gave his first sermon in an open field on "Today is the day of Salvation" . . . . I had never heard such a sermon in all my life. I interpreted his sermon.

"The sermon lasted over an hour and as soon as we sat down nine Hindu men, Marathas, got up, and in that public meeting said: 'We are willing to accept Christ; we knew all about Christ for the last twenty years from the European missionaries; but now we understand truly that He is the only Saviour.' So these nine men, with their wives and children about twelve in number, were baptized by the European missionary who had come with us. In the evening the Sadhu gave another sermon, by which a wealthy Brahmin showed his desire of accepting Christ.

"At night we came back again to the tent. When we two were alone, at about 10 p.m. the Sadhu called me and gave me a scarf of black velvet, with the letters 'Christ came to save sinners' stitched on it with red velvet. He told me that he had been using it for the last three years. He gave it to me as a present. He said before that time he had never seen people ready to become

<sup>1</sup> Mr. David has a remarkable memory. In 1950, thirty-three years after the meetings, he dictated to me his reminiscences. On some points there are discrepancies between the letter from him in *The Cowley Evangelist* and his reminiscences as he told them to me. Where such differences occur, I have preferred his letter, as it was written only a few months after the meetings.—A. J. A.

<sup>2</sup> December 14, 1917.

Christians through an interpreter, and he continued, 'I tell you one thing, if our beloved Lord calls you to do His work, never decline.' Well, this scarf I have kept as my greatest treasure, always wearing it openly.

"One Monday . . . we reached Ratnagiri at 5-30 p.m. and I found that a meeting was arranged at 6-30 p.m. I was very tired, and got frightened as to how I would be able to interpret the Sadhu's sermons before this well-educated and larger audience. I told the Sadhu about this, and he said, 'Don't be afraid, you are not going to interpret, but He for whom you have come'; and then we both knelt down, and he prayed. Oh, that prayer went through and through my heart; it was very short, but so charming, true, loving, full of faith, and as if our Lord was with us.

"Well, anyhow, the first sermon was preached. There was an audience of only Indian Christians and about a dozen European missionaries (men and women). . . . The next day the Sadhu preached three sermons, each lasting over an hour. The old missionary ladies cried during every address; the audience seemed absorbed in thinking about our Lord. We were given a bungalow on the hill, and in that big bungalow we two used to be at night only, otherwise there were sermons and crowds of people coming to see the Sadhu and all the time interpretation of their questions and the answers of the Sadhu. . . .

[At Vengurla] "we gave three more lectures. . . . One was meant for the Hindus. Many pleaders, a Brahmin honorary magistrate, and other educated Hindus were present. They seemed to have been taken up by the personality of the Sadhu; his simple and true life, his way of speaking, his selflessness, all these produced a very great effect on the audience; one of them remarked: 'I never thought that among Indian Christians such a man could be found.'"

I will add here Mr. David's recollections of Sundar Singh's visit to Poona and its neighbourhood in December 1917, as he dictated them to me.

"The Fathers of the Society of St. John the Evangelist invited him for tea. In the course of the conversation one of the Fathers said to him, 'I admire the great work you are doing for Christ. But I don't understand why you allow yourself to be called a Sadhu or saint?' To this Sundar Singh replied: 'I don't want people to call me a Sadhu. I shall be quite happy if they call me Sundar Singh. But because I am leading a different kind of life from others, they call me Sadhu out of their love for me. Sadhu does not mean saint. Sadhu simply means one who follows a Sadhana, that is, a method of prayer and devotion.' But the Father was not satisfied. He pressed his point again and said, 'Our Lord Jesus Christ, when He



was called a good master, said "Call no man good, but God." On this Sundar Singh said : ' The same Lord Jesus commanded : " Call no man in this world Father. You have only one Father, who is in heaven." And yet out of our respect for you we call you Father and you also accept the title.' . . .

" At Kolhapur we had very big meetings. . . . Sundar Singh was invited to go and listen to the boarders in a Girls' Hostel singing Christian lyrics on three successive nights in the open air. He was clad in his usual saffron robe. It was quite cold and he wrapped around himself on the first night the cotton scarf which he generally wore over his robe. The girls, who observed this, collected some money and gave him a warm and expensive shawl on the second night. He accepted the gift gratefully and used it that night as well as on the following night. On the third night as we were returning home from the meeting we saw an old man in tattered clothes under a tree seeking to warm himself before a fire. The Sadhu took off his shawl, wrapped it round the old man and walked away.

" From Kolhapur we went to Ratnagiri. . . . We were given accommodation in a small lonely cottage with a single room and verandah. The local friends had warned us to be careful during the night as the place was infested with snakes. They had put two cots for us in the room. Before retiring to bed the Sadhu said to me : ' Will you help me to carry to the verandah one of these cots ? ' I said, ' Why ? ' ' I should like to be alone,' he said. Then I said to him, ' I will sleep on the verandah and you may sleep in the room by yourself.' And he agreed.

" During the night I heard a gentle movement. When I put on the torch, I saw a snake creeping along. Soon the snake left the verandah and went out into the garden. I flashed the light into the Sadhu's room to see whether any snake had got in there. There was no one on the bed. Rather surprised, I flashed the light all over the room and saw the Sadhuji sitting in a corner. He was cross-legged ; his hands were clasped ; he was deeply absorbed in prayer ; his face shone with joy. It must have been nearly 3 a.m.

" When I asked him the next morning why he was praying at that time, the Sadhu replied, ' When I am on my preaching tours I do not find enough time during the day for prayer. There are so many engagements.' And I asked him : ' Why do you need so much time for prayer ? ' He said, ' It takes fifteen to twenty minutes for me to concentrate. Then I beg in to pray but do not use any words. I feel my beloved Jesus so close to me that I place my hands in His. When morning comes and I have to leave my prayer, it is an effort to break away from my Beloved.'

" At Ratnagiri a special meeting was arranged for the lawyers in the town. They came, with their families. There must have been

about two hundred people present. After the meeting two or three lawyers prostrated themselves before him. The Sadhu said 'Don't do this' and lifted them up. The women crowded round him, took hold of his scarf and put it on the heads of their children. They would also touch his garment reverently. A missionary in the station objected to these signs of veneration and took the Sadhuji to task: 'Why do you allow people to pay you their respect in all these ways?' To this Sundar Singh replied: 'I do not want this honour. They do it out of their love for me.' The missionary replied: 'This honour belongs to Christ, not to you.' Sundar Singh said: 'Well, Sahib, I shall tell you why I get it and why I accept it. My beloved Jesus went to Jerusalem riding on an ass. The people took of their clothes and spread them on the road. It was the ass who walked on the clothes, not Jesus. The ass was honoured because he carried Jesus. I am like that ass. People honour me not for my sake but because I preach Christ.' . . .

"At Vengurla a Brahman magistrate, who happened to be camping there at that time and who was an agnostic, asked for an interview with Sadhu Sundar Singh, who gladly agreed to see him.

"The magistrate said: 'Sadhu, I know your time is valuable and I do not want to take up too much of it. I have made a study of all the religions. There is one problem on which I should like you to shed some light. Every day thousands of men are born and every day thousands of them die. What is the profit of all this to God? I am inclined to believe that there is no meaning in it but that the various elements come together and then get dissolved as one of the processes of nature.'

"The Sadhu said in reply: 'Sahib, you are a learned man and I am not. I may not be able to satisfy you, but with the little grace God has given me I shall try to answer you.'

"Once I was seated in meditation on a hill for some months. In the valley below I saw day after day farmers busy at work. They ploughed, they manured and when the rains came, they sowed. The seeds came up and slowly the plants grew. It was wonderful to watch first the ear, then the blade and then the full corn. When the corn was ripening, the farmers watched the field day and night to see that no harm came to the plants from birds, wild animals or men. Then these same farmers brought their scythes and began cutting the sheaths of corn which they had so carefully nurtured all those months. The plants could well have asked: "What is the profit of all this? Why did the farmers take such a lot of trouble to cut us off like this in the end?" The plants did not know but the farmers knew. We may not know why we are born and why we die, but God does.' . . .

"After a week's meetings at Kadoli it was time for the Sadhu to go to Bangalore. Some people subscribed among themselves to

meet the cost of the tickets for the Sadhu to go to Bangalore and for me to return to Poona, as he very strongly objected to the collection of money either in churches or in meetings to defray his expenses. When the train was about to start, a packet containing Rs. 25 was offered to the Sadhu for his use. He refused to accept it. In spite of that, as the train began to move, the packet was dropped on a seat in the carriage. In one of the stations where the train halted, an old man with ragged clothes and shivering in the cold came near the carriage to beg. The Sadhu looked at that man for a short while, lifted the packet of money and put it in his hands, to his great amazement. It was the Sadhu's strict practice not to receive any money or even food for the journey. The only thing he was ready to accept was a railway ticket to his next destination ; he could not be persuaded to receive anything else. When money was forced on him he gave it away to others."

## CHAPTER 8

### SOUTH INDIA AND CEYLON

1918

SADHU SUNDAR SINGH was expected to arrive in Madras on New Year's Day, 1918. The day began with a drizzle and the weather was distinctly unpleasant to those who wanted to meet him at the railway station. The early morning train never carried a more welcome or a more respected visitor to the Christian Church in Madras.

Sundar Singh was unknown (except by name) to most of the Christians of Madras. There was an air of expectancy and hope. When young men came together, when the members of a family were engaged in conversation after the evening meal, when pastors and church leaders met, the Sadhu was the topic of conversation. There was much curiosity as to what he would look like and how he would preach. Would he be like a Hindu ascetic, lean and austere, showing signs of continued discipline of body and mind? Or would he be like a Buddhist monk with his face serene and calm as the result of his prolonged contemplation? Or would he be like a Roman or Anglican bishop, well preserved and dignified? Would he wear the yellow robe of the Hindu Sanyasi or the silk garment of the Buddhist monk or the white cassock of the European priest? Would he teach abstract philosophy, intelligible only to the highly educated, or would he speak in illustrations and stories which even simple folk could understand?

For several years a group of thoughtful Christians in Madras had formed themselves into the *Christo Samaj*. They were deeply dissatisfied with the work which the European missionaries were doing. They felt convinced that the missionary emphasis on church organization in India was not all wise. To take root in the soil, Christianity must understand the spiritual genius of India and assimilate whatever was good in it. Methods of work, forms of worship and categories of thought must be developed in the Indian Church in accordance with the age-long traditions of the country.

Just as Christianity in Europe had made the philosophy of Greece and the Roman genius for organization its own, so Christianity in India must appropriate Indian thought and practice in order that its appeal to the nation might be really effective.

Mr. P. Chenchiah, who afterwards became the Chief Judge in the State of Pudukotta, thus described Sadhu Sundar Singh as he appeared at the first meeting held in the Memorial Hall in Madras.

“A tall young man delivering his message with the fire of a prophet and the power of an apostle. The audience hung on his lips and never for a moment allowed their eyes to stray from the central figure. The Sadhu was unlike all the mental pictures I had framed of him—he was incomparably superior to all I had thought of him.”<sup>1</sup>

Sundar Singh spent a fortnight in Madras, speaking daily in many of the churches. All his meetings were crowded and even people who came to them an hour before the time could hardly get a seat ; many were thankful to have standing accommodation within reach of his voice. Several had to return home as they could not get even standing room. A father and his son begged for an interview for nearly an hour and went away rejoicing when an engagement was made for them to see the Sadhu. Mothers brought their children and requested the Sadhu to bless them. If he agreed to go to a house for a meal or a visit, it was considered a great honour. Young men took him into their confidence and asked him for guidance in their problems. Touching appeals like “My boy is ill, will the Sadhuji come and pray?” were frequently heard.

Mr. Chenchiah reported an interview with Sundar Singh in *The Christian Patriot* :

“It was a characteristically Indian scene. The Sadhu was in the centre and all sat round him—some on chairs and some on the ground.

“‘Tell us, Sadhuji, about the Secret Sanyasi Mission,’ asked one of us, I forget who. The Sadhu said : ‘Religious work is carried on by a band of Sanyasis who, to all outward appearance, do not differ in any way from the Hindu Sadhus except that they have dedicated their lives to Christ and for the propagation of His message. This Order of Sanyasis insists on a strict discipline and the novice has to undergo twelve years’ training before he gets the title of *Ananda*. Some of them are well educated both in Sanskrit and English and are held in very high estimation in this country. They have an annual conference, at which some of the major problems of their work are discussed. Two of the problems are the necessity of coming out openly in the near future and the desirability of sending some of their Order to America.

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Patriot*, January 9, 1918.

“ ‘ Their method of work is purely Indian and to a large extent individual. Secrecy is enjoined on the disciple with the result that sometimes not even the members of a family are aware of the change of faith, except as it manifests itself in character and conduct. The meetings of the members are invariably held between four and five in the morning, while the rest of the world is asleep. In these meetings a portion of the Scriptures is read in Sanskrit and translated into the vernacular. The Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are observed. It should not be supposed that the secrecy under which the whole work is carried on is in any way detrimental to their faith. I have known many families which will put Christians to shame by their Christian life and zeal.

“ ‘ I first came to know of the existence of this Secret Mission through the Rishi at Kailash and although I do not belong to the Order myself, I can bear testimony to the great Christian work that is done by them. In my wanderings in Northern India it has been my good fortune to come across some of the leaders of this Order and I have been greatly struck with the sacrifice and love with which the message of our Lord is being spread through their agency.

“ ‘ On one occasion while I was preaching on the banks of the Ganges the people told me that while they liked me as a Sanyasi they did not like my message and they requested me to visit a great Hindu preacher who lived close by and who was attracting large crowds. For three days I could not get near him on account of the crowds. One day I was able to meet him when he was alone, and when I told him that I was a disciple of Christ he embraced me and said, “ Brother, we are both doing the same work.” Surprised at this greeting I told him that I never heard him preach Christ, to which he replied, “ Is there any foolish farmer who will sow without preparing the ground? I first try to awaken in my hearers a sense of spiritual values and when a thirst and hunger for righteousness is created I place Christ before them. On the banks of this ancient river I have baptized nearly twelve educated Hindus during the last twelve months.” He then opened his satchel and showed me the Bible which he always carried with him. . . .

“ ‘ The great need of the day,’ concluded the Sadhu as we took leave of him, ‘ is that the Church should have a broad vision. The Christian should transcend the limitations of sect and creed and be prepared to recognize the Spirit of the Lord in whatever form it may manifest itself. The Secret Sanyasi Mission has the blessing of our Lord, and, though it has taken a form we are not accustomed to, yet it is given to its leaders to do great things in this country. May we rejoice at this and praise the Lord for having planted in this country a light which is shedding its rays on many a heart beyond the pale of our conventional churches.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Patriot*, February 1918.

When the Christian leaders in Madras sought to explain the secret of Sundar Singh's powerful appeal to all classes of men, they felt sure that the reasons for his astonishing hold were three—his life as a Sadhu, his work as an evangelist in Tibet under circumstances of extraordinary difficulty, and his gift of illustrating the deepest truths of the Christian religion by parables from nature and by incidents from his own life.

Sundar Singh had been continuously on tour for over six months. He had returned in August 1917 to Kotgarh from his preaching tour in the Himalayas. Towards the end of September he had begun a long tour in which he had visited Lucknow, Cawnpore, Allahabad, Mirzapore, Benares, and other towns. Then he had toured in the state of Bombay. From the first of January 1918 until April he was preaching in Madras, Vellore, Trichinopoly, Calicut and numerous other towns in South India.

His average stay in any one town was three days. Every day he generally spoke in three public meetings and had numerous interviews. In Trivandrum he went to bed one night at one o'clock. At two o'clock some Hindu young men, like Nicodemus of old, sought his advice. He immediately woke up and talked with them for the rest of the night. The moist heat of South India was a great trial to him, as he had spent all his life in the Punjab and in the Himalayas. In a letter to a friend in the North he spoke of himself as a dissolving lump of salt and added that he was "willing to melt like salt if only the South might be salted". He was very tired and needed a rest on the hills during the hot weather.

My father, Dewan Bahadur A. S. Appasamy, who was spending the hot weather at Woodcot, Shenbaganur, three miles below Kodaikanal, invited him to spend two months with him. Sundar Singh accepted the invitation and arrived there on April 12.

Woodcot was ideally suited as a place of rest for the Sadhu. It was situated in eight acres of land, which had a great deal of wild and rugged beauty. They were thickly wooded with eucalyptus, wattle and acacia trees. There was a lovely little stream flowing through the grounds and its quiet murmur added to the charm and peace of the place. Near the bungalow stood two tall champaka trees laden with fragrant yellow flowers. Besides the bungalow there was a cottage. In these lonely surroundings Sundar Singh had all the quiet for prayer and meditation for which his soul craved and which he had not been able to get in the course of his strenuous tour.

I was studying theology in America at that time, but I find from a long letter written by my father that Sundar Singh's main occupation during those weeks was to improve his knowledge of the English language. In his anxiety to preach the Gospel immediately he had not even completed his High School course.

He did not believe in education. He felt sure that the best way of preparing himself for God's work was by prayer, by Bible study and by poring over the pages of the Book of Nature. Now as he grew in years and travelled to different parts of India he became anxious to preach in English. It was very difficult for him to get interpreters from Hindustani into the regional languages and some of the men who were provided for this work were, as he said, more interrupters than interpreters. Particularly in South India he felt that if he had only known English he could have spoken in many meetings without the help of an interpreter. Invitations from other parts of the world were coming in and a knowledge of English would be quite essential.

My father was a convert from Hinduism and after work as a lawyer had retired from his profession when he was fifty-four, in order to devote his time entirely to prayer, religious study and evangelistic work. He was seventy-one years old at that time. He felt convinced that, if such a vast country as India was to be evangelized, it could only be done by Sadhus and not by elaborate Church organization. He rejoiced to meet Sundar Singh and hoped that he could persuade him to establish a Christukul for training Christian Sadhus. But Sundar Singh was a solitary by nature and experience and nothing came out of my father's proposals. At different times in Sundar's life others had made such proposals but to none of them had he agreed.

My brother, Professor Kirubai Appasamy of the Lucknow Christian College, has sent me the following recollections of this holiday :

“ The Sadhu stayed with father at Shenbaganur for six weeks. Both Sundar Singh and I occupied the cottage and even there he chose to live in the smaller rooms.

“ Father told him to suggest any changes in the way of food. But the Sadhu said he had no preference. When father pressed him a good deal, the Sadhu said finally that whatever drink was given to him, milk or coffee or tea, he wanted it as hot as possible. So we gave it to him as hot as possible. The silver tumbler in which the drink was served used to be so hot that even the Sadhu could not hold it. He wrapped it with the end of his turban, and what was too hot for the hand he drank straight off in a gulp. He liked peas best, then dhal [Indian pulse] of all kinds. He ate very little rice. He was fond of fruits, both fresh and dried, and munched nuts. He preferred milk to tea or coffee. Between tea and coffee, he chose tea.

“ When any one presented him with new clothes, most often he refused ; sometimes he was forced to take them, in which case he invariably gave away his old clothes. He presented to me one of his old turbans, which was about half a yard wide and about ten or twelve yards in length ; I carried it about as a souvenir for years.



Like all Sikhs, he was very particular about his turban being tied neat and tidy. Among the Sikhs one could say from the shape of a man's turban what social class his ancestors came from. I could guess that Sundar's people belonged to the higher social strata.

“He often bathed in the stream just a hundred yards behind the house. Before bathing he washed his clothes and put them out to dry. He rubbed oil on himself, which made his fair body glisten as if it were moulded out of twenty-carat gold. He bathed ten minutes or more and dried himself with the cloth which he wore as a scarf over his robe. He then sat cross-legged, half in the shade and half in the sun. He often meditated, sometimes read, occasionally prayed, while he waited for the clothes to dry.

“He walked with bare feet in the house but when he went out for long walks he wore sandals. He liked watching birds. He would sit on a rock and keep observing a nest, counting how many young ones there were and how frequently they were fed ; he would quote various passages from the Bible about birds and their habits.

“In those days his knowledge of English was scanty and he never spoke in it if he could avoid it. But he read many books in English in order to improve his knowledge of that language. When anyone gave him books he accepted them with thanks, read them three or four times carefully and sometimes even took notes. After reading the books he presented them to whoever was interested. His notes he threw away when he left. When I asked him why he took notes, he replied that it helped him to remember better.

“Often he would get up at four in the morning, light a candle and read the Bible. Putting out the candle, he would meditate and pray. Father and he often discussed mysticism, particularly of the Yogic type ; which the Sadhu said was not to his liking.”

Sundar Singh had gone to Shenbaganur for a holiday of two months. But he could never be idle for long. When he felt rested after six weeks, he changed his plans and left.

He addressed a public meeting in Jaffna (Ceylon) at Uduvil on May 28, 1918. A special booth with plaited coconut leaves was erected in the American Mission compound by the side of the Uduvil Church. About 2,000 people, both Christians and non-Christians, came to the meeting from all parts of the Jaffna peninsula. All the Christian schools and colleges in the locality were closed so as to enable the students to attend.

This meeting at Uduvil was followed by others in several important centres in Jaffna. Everywhere the meetings were attended by thousands of people and several of them followed him from place to place.

From Jaffna the Sadhu went to Colombo, where Mr. K. R. Wilson, a wealthy businessman and a leading Methodist, financed a series of meetings in the Tower Hall at Maradana, Colombo. Here again, large crowds went to see and hear him. In Colombo a recovery took place in answer to his prayer which led Sundar Singh to make up his mind in the matter of Divine Healing. Mr. K. R. Wilson was an eye-witness and has written an account of the incident.

A boy of twelve years had some internal trouble and had been operated on. He was in a hospital in the city. In the judgment of the leading doctors there, it was considered that the case would take months to heal and even then recovery was not certain. It was not a hopeless case but it was certainly a difficult one.

The mother of the boy asked the Sadhu to visit him in the hospital, but at first he declined to do so. On the following day after one of his meetings on his own initiative he said that he would like to visit the boy. He was taken to the hospital in a car. He asked the boy through his interpreter what he wanted. The boy said that he wished the Sadhu would pray for him and lay his hand on his head. On this the Sadhu said that he was not God and that the boy should look to Jesus for his healing. The boy answered immediately that he knew this but nevertheless he hoped that the Sadhu would meet his request. The Sadhu explained that he could not pray in English and would prefer to pray in his own language, Hindustani. To this also the boy agreed. The Sadhu then offered a prayer in Hindustani and laid his hands on the head of the boy.

After the prayer the temperature of the boy went up very high. The Matron and the Sisters in the hospital were alarmed and, under the belief that the condition of the boy was becoming quite critical, they informed the parents that they should come immediately to the hospital and remain there in case anything should happen. An hour later the temperature began to come down and on either the following day or the next day the boy was healed.

A week later the boy came to a meeting of the Sadhu in one of the colleges and at the close of the meeting he met the Sadhu, who looked at him earnestly and asked him to be a good boy.<sup>1</sup>

The news of this healing spread rapidly and people began to look upon him as a wonder-worker. Sundar Singh said afterwards: "I tried to get them to see that it was the power of Christ in answer to prayer that had healed the boy. As they would not be convinced I determined not to do it again. For I felt that it would encourage superstition and distract from the Gospel I had to preach."

It is a great pity that Sundar Singh refused to exercise widely and regularly this gift of Divine Healing which we know he pos-

<sup>1</sup> F. Heiler, *Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*, pp. 183, 184.

sessed from this as well as from other instances. During the days of his youth when he was working with S. E. Stokes he had gone into leper asylums and plague camps and had ministered to the sick. An Occidental Christian who had imbibed the noblest Christian traditions of social service as an integral part of the Christian life, Stokes had communicated to his youthful Indian companion some of his own firm belief that real Christianity consisted not merely in prayer and preaching but also in the ministry to the sick and the suffering. At that time Sundar Singh had accepted and practised this ideal. But as time went on and the influence of Stokes was withdrawn, he came to believe that prayer and preaching was really spiritual work and that the healing of men's bodies was not. He spent considerable time and energy in developing the gift which he had for the contemplative life and he made remarkable progress in it. The spiritual insight and power he obtained through prayer he eagerly shared with others and preached the Gospel in all parts of the world, and particularly on the Himalayas under conditions of extreme hardship and privation. He would have greatly added to his influence if, like his master Jesus whom he was so anxious to follow, he had been moved with compassion and exercised his gift of Divine Healing as an essential part of his Christian ministry.

The Rev. James Mather, a Methodist minister and District Chairman in Jaffna, writing thirty-one years after Sundar Singh's visit, says :

“ This Saint in the yellow robe influenced me in a most wonderful manner when he came to Ceylon. I had completed my theological training in the United Theological College, Bangalore, and entered the Christian ministry. God in His wonderful way sent the Sadhu then and granted to me the privilege of organising his tour in Ceylon and taking him from place to place throughout the Jaffna district. My close association with the Sadhu just as I was commencing my ministry was providential, as I found later, because it made such a deep impression on me, and coloured the outlook and aim of my life and work as a preacher of the Gospel. His frequent reference to Prayer in his addresses and the remarkable way the glad news of Jesus Christ our Lord was reflected in all its purity and simplicity in the soul of an Indian, like me and almost of my age, were a great challenge to me, pointing to me the need for unreserved surrender to Christ and entire dependence upon Him—lessons I am ever grateful to God to have learnt at the Sadhu's feet, as I commenced my ministry.”<sup>1</sup>

After preaching at Kandy and Batticaloa, Sundar Singh returned to India in July and resumed his preaching tour through the towns in the state of Madras.

<sup>1</sup> From a letter to me dated 22-10-1949.

At Nagercoil a remarkable incident of Divine Healing took place at the time of his visit. A man wrote to Sadhu Sundar Singh in 1926 and said that his wife had been suffering from insanity for a whole year. Various efforts had been made to treat her but without any avail. She was put in chains to restrain her from acts of violence. One day in 1918 she heard that Sadhu Sundar Singh would be passing along the street near her house and when she knew from the noise that he was actually going there, she shouted out, "My helper has come to relief me," and from that moment she became well. On hearing of this incident Sundar Singh offered some special prayers of thanksgiving while conducting a service in a Nagercoil church. The husband narrated that she kept well for a period of eight years and that then there was another attack, for which he requested Sundar Singh to offer prayers.<sup>1</sup>

From July 20 to 26 Sundar Singh was at Trivandrum staying with his friends, the Rev. Arthur and Mrs. Parker, who knew Hindustani and were able to converse with him in that language. Both of them were missionaries of the London Missionary Society. The Sadhu's knowledge of English was still quite limited and he was glad to have the opportunity to talk to people who understood Hindustani. This stay of a week proved quite important, for from it emerged Mrs. Parker's *Sadhu Sundar Singh : Called of God* which had a wide circulation all over the world and which introduced Sundar Singh's life and work to thousands of people.

When Mrs. Parker met Sundar Singh she became interested in his life and asked him to provide material for an account of it in the Malayalam language. It was Mrs. Parker's intention to write a life which would be a source of inspiration and help to the women of Travancore. But, as the work proceeded, it was suggested to her that she might prepare an English biographical sketch of the Sadhu.

In after-years, when several sketches of his life had been published, Sundar Singh regarded Mrs. Parker's book as being his most accurate biography. However, we need to remember that Sundar Singh kept no diaries or journals and narrated from memory the outstanding events in his life. There were certainly many discrepancies of facts as well as dates in what he said to Mrs. Parker.

A deep and lasting friendship grew up from this time on between Sundar Singh and Mrs. Parker. He gave her all the affection which a devoted son would give to his mother and she, on her part, responded fully to his love. He wrote to her hundreds of letters, most of them short notes, giving her an account of the work which he was doing. However busy he was with meetings and interviews, he found time to write these letters. Mrs. Parker herself is no longer living. The surviving members of her family do not

<sup>1</sup> From the Subathu papers.

possess these letters. Towards the end of his life the critics of Sundar Singh ransacked all possible fragments of information available about him, so as to point out discrepancies in what he said and bring him discredit. Perhaps Mrs. Parker destroyed all the letters she had received from him in order that his enemies might not get at these intimate and personal notes, in which he had revealed his heart to her without any idea of their ever being published.

Wherever he went he spoke boldly against the particular weakness of the people whom he addressed. With a sure touch he laid his finger on the weakest point in the Church in South India—its caste divisions. He said :

“ We can compare India to a man. The Himalayas are his head, South India is his feet, Punjab his right hand and Bengal his left. If this man is to stand firm he has to stand on South India, his feet. South India is indeed fit for this. The Christians of South India are very advanced, in numbers as well as in education. But, though many of their churches are self-supporting, and though this man can stand on his feet, he is unable to walk now. What is the reason ? . . . Caste distinction is its main weakness. Through this and other causes there is lack of love, and therefore lack of anxiety to save others. If this disease is healed the Church of South India will be used as an instrument, and guide the other churches of India.”<sup>1</sup>

As a result of his tour in South India a close friendship was formed between him and the Rev. H. A. Popley, who was at that time a missionary of the London Missionary Society, working at Erode. Mr. Popley writes :

“ I was with him at a number of conventions when he was surrounded by admiring crowds, who wanted to touch his feet. He always deprecated any such signs of homage and would even ask that no one should come to see him off, or at any rate that only the people who had to put him on the right train and buy his ticket should do so. He always refused to accept any money from people. He even refused presents, though he would take anything that was absolutely necessary to his work and journeys. For a time he only had one outer garment, a yellow robe, but later he accepted an additional one. Once at Erode when he stayed at our house, a friend wanted to make a present to him and gave him a fine rug. He took the rug graciously and then asked the friend to accept it from him as a present.”

Sundar Singh wrote several letters to Mr. Popley, which are now with him. These letters, though brief, are on occasions quite revealing.

<sup>1</sup> B. H. Streeter and A. J. Appasamy. *The Sadhu*, p.230.

*In every letter Sundar Singh thanks Mr. Popley for his prayers and believes firmly that the great success of the meeting was due to such prayers. He also says in one of his letters, "Please don't write 'Sadhuji' to me. I am your little brother in Christ. I shall be glad if you will write 'little brother' instead of 'Sadhuji'." And he signed himself "your loving little brother Sundar Singh". This touch of affection and humility on the part of Sundar Singh, who was drawing such immense crowds and to whom people showed the greatest marks of veneration, is quite significant.*

## CHAPTER 9

### THE FAR EAST AND TIBET AGAIN

1918-1919

AFTER some more months of strenuous meetings and interviews in South India, Sundar Singh went to Bombay for a conference. From there he proceeded to Calcutta, where he had an attack of influenza. He wrote about this period of illness : " In sickness God has given me the rest and time for prayer I could not get in the South." After his recovery he spent a few days at Bolpur in Bengal with the Indian poet, Dr. Rabindranath Tagore. Here also he had an opportunity for prayer in the quiet and seclusion of the poet's home, which was true to its name of *Shantiniketan*, meaning the abode of peace.

From Calcutta Sundar Singh sailed for Burma. This was his first long sea voyage. He wrote about it : " I have much time for prayer and am reading many new pages in the Book of Nature." From early youth he had come to love the Himalayas with their glorious mountain scenery. He had become convinced that the Book of Nature was a revelation of God and that, after the Bible, he should study it closely, laying aside the many books which occupied men's attention, much to their loss. In his long tours through the Himalayas he had learnt to observe minutely the happenings in Nature as the handiwork of God. But living as he did in the Punjab, several hundred miles inland, his Book of Nature had not so far included all the wonders and mysteries of the sea. Now for the first time as he started out on his long voyages across the seas, he read the new pages in the Book of Nature with the same zest with which one would read a new book by a favourite author.

He was not devoted to Nature in the way in which the ancient Greeks were. They loved Nature for its sheer beauty and sought to describe it vividly in their poetry and to give it living shape in their art. His attitude to Nature was like that of the Hebrew prophets and psalmists who saw in it the manifestation of God's

power and goodness. The ancient Rishis and Yogis of India had loved Nature and had lived in constant communion with it. They had sought the seclusion of the forest and the mountain for their prayer and meditation. The sunrise and the sunset were daily occasions for the chanting of the special prayer known as *Gayatri*. The march of the seasons had its feasts and fasts. Sundar Singh had inherited from the ancient Rishis and Yogis of India their deep love for Nature and their conviction that communion with Nature was an essential pathway to fellowship with God. But he always realized that the Presence of God in the human soul was a far more significant fact than the Presence of God in creation.

“One day I saw a flower and began to think about its fragrance and its beauty. As I thought more deeply, I saw the Creator behind His creation, though hidden from my gaze. This filled me with joy. But my joy was greater till when I found Him working in my own soul. I was led to exclaim: ‘Oh! How wonderful Thou art! Separate from Thy creation and yet ever filling it with Thy glorious Presence.’”<sup>1</sup>

Passionately fond as he was of Nature and constantly as he sought opportunities for close contact with it, he never identified Nature with God. There was no trace whatsoever of Pantheism in his teaching. He once said that the Hindu seers, the poets of the Vedic hymns, lost God in Nature and that the Christian mystics found God in Nature. Sundar Singh never obliterated the great distinction between God and Nature. To him God was the Creator, infinitely supreme, and Nature was His creation, wholly dependent on Him. In his thought and in his practice God remained supremely great while Nature was but the work of His hands.

Sundar Singh wrote to the Rev. H. A. Popley about his preaching tour in Burma :

Rangoon, 26-12-18.

My dear Brother,

I have finished touring in Burma and we are going to have the last meeting to-night in Rangoon. The steamer is expected to sail to-morrow evening for Singapore. The owner of the steamship company is so kind that he has granted two second-class passes from here to Singapore.

Praise God that He blessed the meetings beyond our expectations in the different parts of Burma. You can get definite information about the work in these parts from the people of

<sup>1</sup> Sundar Singh, *Reality and Religion*, p. 18.



Rangoon, who know these things better than I do. You have a great share in this great work of the Lord. I am very thankful to you for your kind help and for your prayers.

With many kind regards and love,  
Yours affectionately,

SUNDAR SINGH

On December 27, 1918, he left for Singapore. On arrival, he and his friends were in a difficulty. No one had come with him to interpret his addresses as had been expected. He thought that in a large cosmopolitan city like Singapore he could easily get an interpreter. But there was no one to help him. For some time Sundar Singh had been devoting all his spare moments to improving his knowledge of English, but he had been diffident about preaching in English. Here in Singapore as there was no other alternative he began to preach in English for the first time, after having confessed his limited knowledge of that language.

For thirteen years Sundar Singh had been preaching continuously and he had attained considerable experience as a public speaker. But he had always given his addresses in Hindustani or other Indian languages. He thus described to an interviewer his first experience as a public speaker in the English language.

“When I preach in English I feel an ‘earth-quake’ in me. As when fire and other matters under the earth cannot escape there is an earthquake, so when thoughts in my heart have no means of escape my heart quakes.” But on the eve of his departure he said, “I was nearly discouraged in the beginning. But I thank God for having given me Singapore as a school of practice so that I may, in future, be of better service to Him.”<sup>1</sup>

He wrote to the Rev. H. A. Popley :

Ipoh,  
Federated Malaya States,  
January 18, 1919.

My very dear brother,

God has abundantly blessed the meetings at Singapore and Kuala Lumpur . . . . Your prayers have been a great help and the means of blessing, for which I must thank you heartily.

From here I shall be going to Penang on the 23rd instant for four or five days and then back to Singapore and from there I shall be going to Japan en route China in the first week of

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Patriot*, February 8, 1919,

February. Nobody has written about the Kailash trip as yet. I hope to be back again in India sometime in April or May.

Your ever loving brother,  
SUNDAR SINGH

Sundar Singh's visit to Penang aroused considerable interest. "The Sikh meeting held this morning in St. George's Tamil Chapel was a great success. The Chapel was full and at the close of the meeting a Sikh gentleman invited the Sadhu to speak in the Sikh Temple."<sup>1</sup>

A fortnight later he wrote another letter about his work in Malaya which was published in *The Christian Patriot* :

"I am glad to say that my mission in Straits Settlements is over and I am leaving for China and Japan on the 3rd instant, as Christians in those countries have requested me to go there and address some meetings. I am very thankful for the prayers of all my brethren. I know that the great blessings which we have received in Burma and Straits Settlements are the results of your prayers. . . .

"It is now more than four months since I announced in this paper that I would be glad to take with me to Kailash any persons who are anxious to see the Maharishi. I have received no replies from anybody except a friend. Even he is not yet certain about it. So now in response to invitations I am going to Japan and China and from there I shall be going to my mission field in Tibet some time in April or May.

"God has opened a great field for work before me. I have already received many calls from America and Europe. So I shall be very grateful if brethren will continue to help me through their prayers."

The Rev. Arthur Champion wrote an account of Sundar Singh's visit to the Federated Malaya States in which he said : "Without money, without a home, clad in the simple saffron-coloured robe, he started tramping from place to place, like a Friar of the Middle Ages, preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and commending it by the self-sacrifice of his life. Of late years his growing fame and the practice of 'running' him, so to speak, by committees and so on, has tended rather to mar the ideal of apostolic simplicity and poverty with which the Sadhu started his missionary labours in Tibet and North India. According to Christ's injunction, 'Into whatsoever house ye enter, there remain, eating and drinking such things as they give', he accepts any hospitality offered him, whether simple or rich food, ricksha or motor-car, 3rd or 1st class carriage. These things to him are matters of indifference: but there appears to be

<sup>1</sup> *The Straits Settlements Times*, January 25, 1919.

a danger lest such accessories as these, if multiplied, should tend to obscure the meaning and purpose and reality of his life as a *Sanyasi*. His message undoubtedly makes a strong appeal to Indians, who flock to hear him. His language is simple and clear, and his illustrations homely, yet often profound, and usually extremely apposite and illuminating.”<sup>1</sup>

From Tokyo in Japan he wrote on February 27, 1919 to Mr. K. T. Paul, the General Secretary of the National Council of Y.M.C.As in India : “ Nowadays I am busy in the Lord’s work here . . . . People have arranged meetings for me here and in Yokohama, Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe and Nagasaki. After two or three weeks I shall be going to China. The China Inland Mission’s missionaries are arranging some meetings for me in Shanghai, Peking, Nanking and Hankow. So the door is open to preach the Gospel among the different nations of the world.”

The Rev. T. Kanai has written a letter to me about Sundar Singh’s visit to Japan :

“ Sadhu Sundar Singh was unknown in Japan in 1919. Having heard that a Japanese evangelist was in Singapore, the Sadhu visited him unexpectedly, wishing to come to Japan. This evangelist was the Rev. Goyu Umemori. He and Mrs. Umemori were sitting at table when Sundar arrived ; Mrs. Umemori was startled by this mysterious man’s call. While the three were sitting around the table and talking, although they could scarcely understand each other’s language, they felt a spiritual joy and were deeply moved. It seemed as if Sundar’s face and clothes were shining ; when they looked at his kimono they noticed that it was not clean—there were even some spots here and there—but they received a deep impression of his personality. When he was about to leave, picking up a blanket and a New Testament, he said, ‘ I have nothing beside these, but I am going out to the uttermost part of the world as a witness for Christ.’ Umemori could not comprehend this as he thought Sundar should have more than these. He went downstairs and opened the door to see him off. There was a group of rough Bengali workmen making a noise and quarrelling with one another, but when Sundar Singh appeared they stopped suddenly and everybody got on his knees and made a profound obeisance to him. He also saluted them in return, lifting up both of his hands high. When he was leaving, Umemori got his autograph and afterwards he found that his visitor was Sundar Singh whose biography appeared in Japanese. . . .

“ Sundar Singh landed in Japan and had meetings in Kobe, Osaka, Kyoto and Tokyo. As there was no preparation beforehand, the attendance in the meetings was small, but he made a

<sup>1</sup> *The Singapore Diocesan Magazine*, February 1919.

very deep impression in every place to which he went. Some young people of a Church at Kobe decided that they, like him, were not going to wear socks that winter; they also diligently engaged in evangelistic work.

“ At Osaka, while he was walking through the campus of Pool Girls’ High School, a girl dashed into the principal’s room in a great hurry, and shouted ‘ Teacher, teacher, here comes Jesus, here comes Jesus!’ . . .

“ At Kyoto, because he had brought a bishop’s recommendation from China to a Caucasian bishop in Japan, the bishop requested the evangelist Rev. Takaharu Takamatsu to take care of him, as he was about to leave for a trip. Hearing that a barefooted Indian had come, the bishop’s wife showed him into a maid’s room. But after receiving a deep impression at the meeting, this lady changed her attitude completely and came to treat him very courteously. . . .

“ At Tokyo . . . he preached one night in Fujimi Church, which had the largest congregation of any church in Tokyo. Several theological students heard his message and one of them spoke reminiscently that he remembered well his message as a whole after more than ten years. When he came up to the pulpit, people thought that Christ was standing there. . . .

“ Very little was known about him by the majority of people, or by Christians, in Japan. After he left, some were amazed at the fact that there was such a great evangelist in India. When his Japanese biography was printed, many people marvelled at him because of the facts of his life, his simple and appropriate teaching and also the deep sympathy he had for the Japanese as an Oriental race.”

From Japan Sadhu Sundar Singh went to China. A missionary of the China Inland Mission wrote about him from Shanghai on March 13, 1919 : “ We have had staying with us an Indian gentleman—Mr. Sundar Singh. Mrs. Cox sent a little book to Miss Murray last year about him. It was called *A Lover of the Cross* and it gave some of his experiences. He is very clean and takes just what is given him in the way of food. He eats very little and is quite willing to put up anywhere, and if friends cannot give him any shake-down perhaps you would help him to some Chinese inn, or help him on his way as, of course, he does not speak Chinese.”

From Hankow Sundar Singh wrote on March 23, 1919, to Mr. Popley :

“ I have been in Shanghai and Nanking and from here I am going to Pastringfu and Peking. Although on account of influenza

we cannot have large meetings in China, still we are having a very blessed time here . . . .

“I wanted to go to Tibet from China but now it is quite impossible because the Chinese are fighting with the Tibetans. So now I have to come back to India and then go to Tibet, but I am not sure when I shall be able to get the steamer for India. Nowadays it is very difficult to get a berth. I shall write to you again from Peking or Shanghai. From Peking I shall be going to Tunsir and Shanghai. . . . Some friends are arranging for me to go to some other places in China. . . . I never realized before that God will make me, an unworthy servant, to be witness before the different nations of the world. His name be glorified. Amen. . . .”

We may note here how thankful to God he is for giving him an opportunity to bear witness for Him among different nations. Up to that time he had had many fruitful meetings in India. He had also had wonderful opportunities for preaching the Gospel in Ceylon, Burma and the Malay States. In all these countries, however, the majority of his audience had been Indians. They had gathered in large numbers to hear one of their own countrymen who had crossed the seas to preach to them. But in Japan and China he came for the first time in contact with other nations.

Sundar Singh arrived in Madras on May 9, 1919. Mr. Chenchiah met him and described him as being “a picture of health and spiritual radiance without a trace of weariness visible after what must have been a most tiresome voyage.” Sundar Singh no doubt used his enforced leisure on board the steamer for communion with Christ, which always filled him with joy and peace. This inner experience made his face shine with a heavenly light.

Mr. Chenchiah records thus his interview with Sundar Singh. “Is it true,” he asked, “that you were followed by an Arya Samaj preacher wherever you went?” “Not all through my tour,” replied the Sadhu. “But an ‘Arya’ preacher by name Mangalananda followed me in Rangoon and Burma. As his stock in trade consisted in crude and vulgar abuse of Christianity people soon discovered that he had no message to give and he dropped off.”

The conversation then drifted to his stay in China and Japan. The greatest difficulty the Sadhu had in these countries was to eat his food with chop-sticks. On Japan, the Sadhu entertained strong views. When Mr. Chenchiah told him that an American missionary, who had done extensive religious work in Japan and China, held that we could learn much from Japan, the Sadhu replied with emphasis that in intellectual and spiritual matters India had nothing to learn from Japan. Japan was no doubt a great country. But, according to the Sadhu, her recent victories had shattered the foundations of her spiritual life. “Japan has plunged herself in the soul-killing floods of Western materialism.

Her eyes are filled with visions of worldly greatness. She is in the fury of making money and has no ear for the Word of God. . . . All religious appeals fall flat on the Japanese. In my conversations with her leaders, I drew attention to the growing immorality in the country. I was not able to get from them even a nominal condemnation of things which would have shocked the moral susceptibilities of an ordinary Indian. The worst of it is, Japan does not take even Buddhism seriously. Her temples are thronged with tourists and guides more than with devotees. In China things are not so bad. The Chinaman has still reverence and love for religion. He is capable of the highest spiritual development."

Mr. Chenchiah asked the Sadhu what his experience was with Chinese students and about the truth of the stories of Chinese students accepting Christianity in large numbers. The Sadhu said :

" In China and Japan one great obstacle to the acceptance of Christianity present in India, the caste difficulty, is non-existent. That makes it easier, socially, for a man to accept Christ. Some of the highest officers in China are Christians and good Christians too. With regard to students, there is a danger of testing the growth of Christianity among them by the number of pledge cards they sign. I don't much believe in it. When I addressed a meeting in China, nearly all the students present (some hundreds) signed cards promising to study the claims of Christ. I know enough of human nature to believe that not more than one-hundredth of them will be able to keep their promise. But, taking all things into account, the Chinese are more open to persuasion than the Japanese."

A meeting was hurriedly arranged for him in the Memorial Hall in Madras. The news of the meeting spread through the city as if on wings of fire. There were three to four thousand people in the Hall to hear his message. He spoke on the text, " Ye shall be witnesses unto me unto the uttermost parts of the earth " (Acts 1 : 8). He said :

" All Christians are under a solemn obligation to bear witness for Christ, not it may be in words but in life and action. . . .

" I am not here to speak of what I do not know but of what I have seen and heard, even of the Eternal Word of Life. The Christian experience is a dearly bought experience; I still remember the 7th of June 1914 when in Nepal I was thrown into prison, tied hand and foot. It was not suffering to me. It was pure joy, a foretaste of Heaven. It is the privilege of human beings to bear the Cross like our Lord, and the angels in heaven envy our opportunity. But we seem to be slow to avail ourselves of the splendid chances that are opening for true witnessing. . . . When I was coming from Japan on board the steamer, I saw in mid-ocean black clouds rising from the sea under the influence of the sun.

The clouds floated off in the far horizon, dark, towering, and majestic, I knew that they contained pure and refreshing water to drink. They had left the salt of the sea behind. So also the clouds of our prayer-life leave behind the saltish taste, and will descend again like sweet water upon the parched fields and flow in the streams and be in the lakes and tanks for men and animals."

He closed his address thus : " I am going to the hills and to Tibet ; it is quite uncertain whether I shall be able to return, so serious are some of the risks attending the journey and my work in the regions beyond. Even if I do not see you again in this world, I hope to meet you in heaven amidst the revelation of a new life and its surroundings. I wish you good-bye till we meet again."<sup>1</sup>

For the next ten years he was constantly speaking and writing in this vein about his journey to Tibet. His critics thought that he was merely frightening his friends and seeking to win cheap popularity, but his letters show how eager he was to work in Tibet, while fully aware of the dangers involved.

In *The Christian Patriot* Sundar Singh had offered to take with him any persons who wished to meet the Maharishi of Kailash. He had made this offer before he sailed to China and Japan. After his departure it was found that passports could not be obtained for Europeans to go into Tibet, but some Indians were willing to take the risk of entering without passports. The Sadhu was on tour in the Far East, continually moving from place to place, and letters could not reach him. So without his knowledge arrangements were made for a party to accompany him, the necessary funds being raised by his friends in Colombo and Trivandrum. Mr. K. R. Wilson of Colombo found five-sixths of the amount and also proposed to go himself.

The Sadhu's return to India was delayed. He reached Madras only in May, as we have already seen. Soon after the mammoth meeting in the Memorial Hall he hastened up to the Himalayas.

Instead of going straight to Almora, whence the party was to leave, he went on to Kotgarh. Only then did he hear of the friends who wished to go with him to Kailash and of the finances which had been arranged for the trip.

In the course of his long walk of fifty miles between Simla and Kotgarh, the Sadhu injured his foot and was unable to undertake the round-about journey to Almora. After showing signs of getting better, his foot suddenly grew worse and he fell ill with fever. He suggested that the party might go to Kailash under the leadership of the Rev. Yunas Sinha and that he would meet them by a shorter route as soon as he was able to walk. This was not

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Patriot*.

found feasible and the expedition had to be dropped. The money which was raised was given back to the donors.

There was another party of three missionary ladies who were waiting to go with him to Kailash and who were similarly disappointed. The leader of this party was Miss Mary Dobson.

This remarkable woman was one of those who were permanently influenced by Sundar Singh. She was Warden of the Women's University Settlement in Bombay for twenty-three years. In this capacity she had numerous opportunities for coming in contact with women students of Western India, as well as with many other educated Indian women. She was the eldest daughter of Austin Dobson, the English poet. She inherited her father's gifts and wrote some poetry, but her artistic powers lay more in the direction of music: she played beautifully and was herself a composer of some distinction.

When Sundar Singh arrived in Bombay in 1917 to hold meetings there, Canon Joshi introduced him to Mary Dobson knowing that she was anxious to ask him certain questions, as her editorship of *The Bombay Guardian* brought her some critical letters about him. She was at once much impressed with his sincerity and invited him to meet others at the Settlement; this was the first of his many visits there.

Mary Dobson had a mystical strain in her nature. She had her moments of spiritual insight about which she spoke sometimes to her intimate friends. Christ was the supreme object of her devotion. She felt drawn to Sundar Singh because his mystical devotion to Christ struck a responsive chord in her. In after years she carried far and wide the inspiration she had derived from her knowledge of Sundar Singh.

She was particularly interested in Sundar Singh's statement about an early manuscript of the New Testament. In 1918 she visited America as a Travelling Secretary for the Student Volunteer Movement in the colleges of the United States and Canada. Before leaving the United States she called in New York on a leading theologian, an old acquaintance of hers in India, and with him discussed what Sundar Singh had said about the existence of an early manuscript of the New Testament in the possession of a Christian hermit of great age, who was living in prayer and meditation in Mount Kailash. Encouraged by the deep interest shown by that Biblical scholar, Mary wrote to Sundar Singh as to the possibility of obtaining this valuable manuscript for the Christian world.

In 1919, during her summer vacation in May and June, Mary and two other missionary friends set out on this quest. Unfortunately passports to enter Tibet could not be obtained, but, nothing daunted, they started.



She writes : " We met at Almora. Our first few days were busy ones, for we had to take with us practically everything we wanted in the way of food! We actually started on the 7th of May ; it seemed quite an army, for we had twenty-one coolies.

" Day after day we started off at early dawn and went quietly on, mile after mile. I generally worked at Hebrew hard some of the way, but often the scenery was too glorious, and I had to give it my whole attention. We soon got to snow-covered mountain peaks, and I can conceive few things more beautiful than the white ranges and the golden cornfields we passed. Added to everything was the inspiration of our quest ; we felt we were going on a sort of Holy Grail search....

" We came suddenly at last in sight of Badrinath, a small brown-looking place amid snow mountains, only relieved by the golden roof of the temple. It was an extraordinary experience to be there. It is scarcely ever visited, except by explorers, and it swarms with holy men and women.

" We waited at Badrinath for a week, hoping that Sundar Singh would come up with us. I knew already by wire that he was in India. But he did not come and at last we had reluctantly to turn back. A few stages down, I got a letter forwarded to me from Bombay, saying that Sundar Singh had arrived and had gone, straight up to Kotgarh by Simla. He wrote himself, evidently having no idea that I had gone up to Badrinath, and it was clear that he had not had my letters. I found afterwards that one letter to me from Penang had been delayed, in which he said that if we could not get the passports right into Tibet he thought he had better go up alone, and he knew nothing of my wonderful plans. Of course it was all disappointing in one way, but from another point of view we had had such wonderful signs of God's Presence with us that we could not doubt that our apparently wild-goose chase was with some strange purpose."<sup>1</sup>

When she was a child an agnostic cousin had told her that Christianity lacked foundation. Mary had realized how much it might mean to the world, could earlier manuscripts of the New Testament be discovered, and she had prayed that she might find one. She had forgotten her prayer until she actually began this journey.

When Sundar Singh's foot was healed he began his journey to Tibet, though he actually went only as far as Spiti on the Tibetan border.<sup>2</sup>

I shall now quote from a letter written by Sundar Singh, giving a detailed account of this tour :

<sup>1</sup> Una M. Sanders, *Mary Dobson*, pp. 152-159.

<sup>2</sup> For notes on the places mentioned by Sundar Singh in this journey, see Gabler, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*. Tibetan border : see p. 40 above.

“ In the beginning of July (1919) I left Kotgarh for Tibet in company with a Christian whose Tibetan name is Thaniyat. The Tibetan frontier is nearly 130 miles beyond Kotgarh, and after preaching in Hirath (and elsewhere) we arrived at Yangpa which is the first town of Tibet. From here, for forty miles, the country is entirely jungle and there is not a single village or dwelling-place, only here and there a flock of sheep and shepherd come into view. We remained in this wilderness five nights ; one night we spent under a tree and another night in a cave ; from now onwards for a long distance there are no trees because of the extreme cold and great height, so that scarcely a blade of grass springs up anywhere. As far as the eye can reach there is nothing but bare mountains and plateaux.

“ At a height of 16,000 feet we slept out of the open plain when the cold was so intense that all feeling went out of the body and we became numb all over. The whole of one night the rain fell in torrents and in the bitter cold we had to sit all night under an umbrella. This place is a very dangerous one, for many people have died in the snow.

“ On the 15th of July we came to Hangpu La Pass, which is nearly 19,000 feet high, where we saw the corpses of three men who had died from the terrific cold. At this great height we could scarcely draw our breath, our heads and lungs were filled with pain, and the beating of our hearts sounded in our ears. Here is a great glacier in which many people have lost their lives, and their bodies have never been recovered to this day. Thanks be to God we passed through this awful place in safety.

“ On 16th July we arrived at a Tibetan village called Mudh, where the headman received us into his house kindly, and that night he invited an important Lama to dine with us ; he understood Hindustani, and we preached the Word ; he listened himself with great attention and pleasure and did not prevent others from hearing also. The next day we went on . . . and preached in every place we passed through . . .

“ In Tibet there are not only one but many kinds of hardships and difficulties. There are no roads, and although there are many streams and rivers there are no bridges to cross them, and the water is always cold as ice. Wherever the water was shallow enough we were able to swim across, but sometimes the current was so strong and the river bed so full of rocks that swimming became impossible. One day, in swimming across the river Morang, I reached the other bank with great difficulty, for the water was so intensely cold that my whole body became stiff and numb. I fell and went under the water three times, and with great difficulty I got out of that river, a river in which many men have sunk never to rise again.

“ Food is another difficult problem in Tibet. There is nothing to eat and drink in most places except *sampa* or *sattu* (fried barley flour) and a kind of tea which is mixed with salt and butter. Again and again the fried barley was so bad that even horses and donkeys would probably not eat it. In all these difficulties there was this great comfort, that this was the Cross of Christ, and was necessary for the salvation of souls. For me Christ forsook heaven and took upon himself the burden of the Cross, so that if I have left India to come into Tibet on His behalf to claim souls for Him, it is not a great thing to do, but if I had not come, it would have been a dreadful thing, for this is a divine command.

“ Tibetan houses are very small and exceedingly dirty. They are built of stone and mud and the smell of the people is unbearable. In the village of Lara I saw a man who was quite black with dirt, and I think he could not have had a bath for fifteen years at least. The people's clothes, although made of white wool, from filth look as if they were made of black leather, because they never wash their clothes. In the village of Kiwar we washed our clothes in a stream and everybody came to see. They were struck with amazement that we should be doing such a thing. An important Lama said : ‘ It is all right for sinful men to wash their clothes, but for good people to do so is very bad.’ . . .

“ The Lamas in some places received us well and gave us salted tea and fried barley flour to eat. One day they saw that I was uncomfortable because my hair had grown very long. Having no scissors to cut it, four Lamas came along, bringing with them an instrument with which they are accustomed to shear the sheep and with this they cut my hair. . . .

“ Although Tibetans are horribly dirty and often stupidly ignorant, they are also very religious. In some districts the custom is for the eldest son to remain at home to look after the property and all the remaining sons become Lamas or priests. Many people write upon paper or cloth texts from their sacred books (of which there are one hundred and eight volumes) and hang them as flags above the roofs of their houses. Also they write the sacred words OM MANE PADME HUM many times on paper and place the roll inside a brass wheel which they continually turn round and round. Some fasten them on watermills, sometimes writing them on stones which they place in a heap and go round and round them. These, as it were, are their prayer, by which they believe they will gain forgiveness of sins and obtain blessing.

“ Concerning the true God these people know nothing, but in their religion they have a kind of Trinity which is called Sangi Kunchek or Buddha God ; Lama Kunchek or Priest God, and Ghho Kunchek or Scripture God. Buddhism entered Tibet about A.D. 629 in the time of King Shang Taing Saganpo, and Lamaism

was founded in A.D. 749 by Padmasambhava, who started the first monastery near Lhasa.

“ The lives of many Tibetan hermits are very wonderful. They shut themselves in a dark room. Some do this for months, and some for years and some for the whole of life. They are so shut away that they never see the sun and never come out of doors, but always sitting in the dark they continue turning a prayer-wheel in their hand just as if they were living in a grave. In these small rooms there is a tiny window or hole through which the people pass food to these hermits. I tried to get into conversation with them but never had a proper opportunity, and all I could do was to throw some Scripture portion through the hole (in the hope they might read it if ever they come out)... .

“ In this country, because of the snow and intense cold, there is only one harvest in the year, which is sown in May and reaped in September. In some places wheat and in others mustard are sown. Some of the jungly country is beautiful with flowers ; wild onions and even gram are sometimes seen. But alas ! all sorts of evil customs and horrible wickedness prevail, the very mention of which is impossible here.

“ We went to a number of other places and worked amongst the people, returning by another way... My desire was to go alone to Kailash and Rasar, but this year my journey to Tibet was greatly delayed. Between the 30th of July and the 9th of August on that side the mountains become thickly covered with snow and there are many rivers and streams, although some rivers have bridges of ice stretching across them. But there are many rivers which have no bridges at all and they are too dangerous for swimming, so that it seemed as if every way was closed and there was no choice but to return. May God grant that in the coming April I may journey to every place. If I had remained until September the heavy snows would have effectually barred my return and by October it would have been impossible to reach India.

“ This time I went forty-eight stages into Tibet, each day being about ten miles. I should like to tell of every place I visited but there is no time for more than this brief account. Those Christians who live in Tibet itself and on the border are by God's grace well, as far as I am able to find out. There is a boy in Tsering who knows Hindustani well and was very desirous of returning to India with me but his mother prevented him. I trust in another year he will come with me and having received further training may become a good preacher among his own people in Tibet.” (Parker, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, pp. 63-68).

After his return from Tibet, Sundar Singh preached through the towns and villages of the Punjab and reached Ludhiana on October 10, 1919, when he called upon his old friend, Dr. Wherry,

From Sundar Singh's schooldays Dr. Wherry had taken a keen interest in him, and later, when his honesty was called in question, Dr. Wherry bore constant and abundant testimony to the fact that he was a sincere and earnest Christian and not the impostor which his critics made him out to be.

From Ludhiana Sundar Singh went to his village of Rampur and spent a few days with his old father.

At first, as we have seen, Sher Singh had been greatly annoyed to hear of his son's resolve to become a Christian and had tried every possible means to prevent him from disgracing the family name.

For fourteen years from his baptism the Sadhu had prayed incessantly that his father's heart might be changed and that he also might become a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ like himself. When Sundar Singh met his father now at Rampur, he had the great joy of hearing from his father's lips that he wanted to become a Christian. This was indeed a matter for the deepest gratitude to God, and Sundar Singh's heart thrilled with joy when he heard it. Sher Singh said to him : " You have opened my spiritual eyes and you must baptize me." But Sundar Singh declined to do so. He had always taken a firm stand in this matter and had held that it was his duty to preach the Gospel but not baptize; that work should be done by the ordained ministers of the Church. Sundar Singh said to his father, " How can I baptize you, when I have refused to baptize hundreds of others?" Sundar Singh's father died without receiving baptism from anyone.

## CHAPTER 10

### VISIT TO ENGLAND

1920

SUNDAR SINGH was eager to visit the Holy Land and to walk in the footsteps of his Master. But as he was in prayer one day he felt that God called him to go to England, to bear witness there to Christ.

Speaking to a journalist in England after his arrival there Sundar Singh said: "I had a 'call' to preach in England. I do nothing of myself; I wait until I receive a message. I am happy in this country, although it is a land where the sun seldom shines and the Sun of Righteousness is often eclipsed."

He spoke about this call to visit England to his father, who had now become reconciled to him and had also accepted Jesus Christ in his heart. His father agreed to pay for his voyage to England and Sundar Singh immediately booked a berth in the *City of Cairo*, which left Bombay on January 16, 1920. This was soon after the First World War when passages were difficult to obtain. But he was fortunate in getting a second-class cabin all to himself. He always desired privacy for prayer.

Some of his English friends in India were quite surprised to hear that he was sailing for England so quickly. They would have liked to have written to England and prepared the way for him. But he depended on the Lord for giving him opportunities to preach the Gospel and he was not keen to have elaborate arrangements made for him before his arrival.

He arrived in Liverpool on February 10. A letter from Dr. Rendel Harris, the Biblical scholar, gave him a warm welcome: "I understand from my cousin Mary Dobson that some friends will meet you in Liverpool, and send you on to me. If they write or telegraph, I will be at the station to meet you, and you will soon be at home in my little study, and the new friend will soon be an old friend."

From Manchester, where he stayed with Dr. Rendel Harris, he went to the Missionary Training College of the Society of Friends (Quakers) at Selly Oak near Birmingham. There he stayed with

Mr. J. W. Hoyland, the head of that institution. Mr. Hoyland wrote a long letter about Sundar to his son John Hoyland who was working in India as a missionary at that time. This letter is worth quoting almost in full, as it gives a vivid picture of Sundar Singh during the first days of his visit to England :

“ Sundar Singh arrived on Saturday afternoon. Ganguly (a Bengali Friend now taking the M.A. Philosophy course at Birmingham University) and I went down to the station to meet him, and we brought him up here in a taxi. He was very fine-looking in the orange-coloured turban, a long light-pink robe reaching to his feet, and a tangerine-coloured wrap across his chest, over one shoulder and under the other. His worldly belongings were in a rather small leather bag, with ‘ Sundar Singh ’ painted on it.

“ He seemed to find it hard at first to express himself in English ; but he was quite able to tell me, on the way up, of his visit to you at Hoshangabad.

“ He sat by me at the head of the table at supper, and we spent the evening quietly in the drawing-room, listening to his wonderful stories of deliverances, and of his experiences with the old Rishi in the Himalayas. It being half-term, quite a lot of our household are away, which is a pity. Ganguly and I had the Sadhu to ourselves.

“ On Sunday he went to ‘ Meeting ’ at Selly Oak with the three Indians, but took no vocal part. After tea, he talked to our household for about twenty minutes. He wrote letters in his room for most of the day, but in the drawing-room after supper gave us more experiences, which greatly fascinated our people.

“ This morning he spoke for twenty minutes in the Devotional Meeting. He gave a very fine message on Prayer, speaking of it very beautifully as not an exercise to be entered into only at certain times, but as part of the life, continuing always, even in the midst of busy occupations, although he emphasized the need of getting apart into the quiet occasionally for a breath of pure air from heaven, unadulterated with things of earth. He said that prayer should not only be asking for things, but should be taking what is already our own, if the Spirit of God dwells in us.

“ He is much troubled by his small English vocabulary, and I can see that it is very painful to him to be without words wherewith to express his deeper feelings. I am telling him that we want his message, and that I feel sure that it will come through to us, in spite of the language barrier. He told me after the address this morning, that he succeeded in forgetting himself in his message. He speaks very rapidly, like a man who thinks in English and has done so all his life. It seems almost to be a natural gift with him.

“ He is going on from here to Oxford on Thursday to live with the Cowley Fathers. I am offering this as a home for him while he is in England, to return to whenever he likes. He says that he has no quiet whatever in India ; and he seems to appreciate the quiet of our guest-room, where he lives, refusing a fire. Apparently he keeps quite warm. His feet are always bare in the house, and bear traces of cuts and bruises. He walks about the garden or down to the hostel with bare feet, but went to ‘ Meeting ’ in sandals. Whenever Ganguly meets him he greets him with joined hand and bowed head. . . .

(February 18.) “ This morning H. G. Wood gave up his lecture to Sundar Singh, and we had the Lecture Hall packed. Everybody came. He preached powerfully on the verse in Timothy, ‘ I know whom I have believed.’ Again and again he emphasized this point : ‘ It is not enough to know about Christ. You must know him.’ . . . One student told me afterwards that Sundar Singh had entirely cleared away every difficulty about the doctrine of the Atonement which had been puzzling him. It was a fearless address ; the staff and students of the Theological, Teacher Training and Working Men’s Colleges are alike very greatly impressed.”

Mrs. Hoyland also wrote to her son and said : “ It is wonderful having Sundar Singh here; it is unlike anything else that has ever happened; it is indescribable, but it is like having Christ in the house as near as one could imagine what that would be like.”<sup>1</sup>

From this Quaker home Sundar Singh went to Oxford, where he lived in the Community House of the Cowley Fathers, known as the Society of St. John the Evangelist. The Cowley Fathers are High Anglicans and Sundar Singh was at home among them just as he was among the Quakers.

On February 26 he gave an address in the Hall of Balliol College, which was packed with young and enthusiastic undergraduates who listened to him with close attention. His theme was the Incarnation.

In his address at Mansfield College he illustrated the practical character of Christianity by a story which he often told as a fitting commentary on his favourite text, “ Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it ” (Matthew 16:25). “ Crossing a range of mountains in a heavy snowstorm he was joined by a Tibetan who was afraid of going alone. The cold was so intense that they had already begun to despair of reaching their destination alive, when they saw a man who had slipped down a slope of snow some thirty feet below the path, lying there unconscious. The Sadhu asked his companion to help him carry the man to the village. The Tibetan,

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Patriot*, March 27, 1920.



telling him that he was a fool to try to help another when he could barely save himself, left him and hurried on ahead. The Sadhu went down the slope and just managed to get back on to the road again with the man on his shoulders and struggled slowly along. Some distance farther on he perceived his former companion sitting by the wayside. He called, but there was no answer—he was frozen dead. The Sadhu himself meanwhile had become thoroughly warmed by his exertions and, as a result of this warmth and of the friction between their bodies, the man he carried also gradually became warmer and came to; and both reached the village alive and full of thankfulness.”<sup>1</sup>

The average Oxford don or student is a critical person. He speaks out very frankly what is in his mind. The Sadhu came in for a share of this criticism, but on the whole his visit to Oxford produced a profound impression on the University. One student remarked, “As he entered the room, my first impulse was to stand up.” Another student said, “I don’t want to seem irreverent, but as I heard him, I thought I was hearing Christ speak.” A well-known scholar, who had been teaching New Testament all his life, acknowledged how much he had learnt from the Sadhu. A tutor said, “He reminds us of Apostolic days.” The same tutor wrote that no Englishman could have given such a message of Apostolic simplicity and power. One of the clergymen who heard the Sadhu at a meeting held for the Oxford clergy was deeply moved. He said, “I could have kissed his feet.” Several men called on him and thanked him for the strength and inspiration he had brought them.

A student at Oxford was so impressed by the Sadhu’s teaching that religion is a matter of the heart and not of the head that he went and told the Principal of a Theological College: “I agree with the Sadhu about the uselessness of getting mere knowledge. As soon as I get my B.A. I am going out as a missionary. I don’t think I need any theological training.” When the Sadhu heard about this incident he said: “That is not what I meant. Ministers do need training. What I meant was that learning without life is dry bones.” He continued: “I am not opposed to knowledge as such. Only I am raising a strong protest against the modern tendency to emphasize learning too much. Let me give you an illustration. Luther vehemently emphasized justification by faith as a protest against the Roman emphasis on works. He did not despise works altogether.”<sup>2</sup>

At Oxford someone asked him one day while at table what he thought of English Christianity and English life. This was a difficult question for him to answer as he did not want to be discourteous to his hosts. He confessed that he had not been long enough

<sup>1</sup> B. H. Streeter and A. J. Appasamy, *The Sadhu*, pp. 87, 88.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 189, 190.

in England to give a considered opinion, but it seemed to him from what he had seen that too little was made of religion as a source of peace. He told us that spiritual things could not be discerned without quiet and meditation and urged the need in English life and English religion for making more time for prayer and meditation. What he said on this subject was so natural and so effective that it made a deep and unforgettable impression on those who heard it.

On March 6 he visited Cambridge. At quite short notice three meetings were arranged—one for senior members of the University, one for the Theosophists who had at that time a flourishing society in Green Street and who had asked for a meeting, and one for Oriental students. To the meeting for Oriental students sixty men came; they were from Burma and Siam, from China and Japan, and from India and Ceylon. They crowded into the room of a Ceylonese undergraduate in Trinity Hall and sat on the floor. He spoke to them about religion in the simplest language, using many parables and illustrations. One of them was this: "As the fish is in the sea but is not salt, so is the Christian in the world but is not worldly." Most of his hearers were not Christians, but they loved him and listened to him with close attention. They were attracted partly by his earnestness and sincerity and partly also by the fact that he was an Asiatic and so one of them.

Sundar Singh was told that he should read some Science. "What is Science?" "Natural selection, you know, and the survival of the fittest." "Ah, but I," he said gently, "am more interested in divine selection and the survival of the unfit."

One of the lecturers in the University—the Rev. C. F. Angus, later Vice-Master, Trinity Hall—had visited India and met Sundar Singh several times there. Sundar stayed with him at Cambridge as his guest. Mr. Angus was deeply impressed by Sundar Singh.

On February 13, 1949 (twenty-nine years after this visit), Mr. Angus preached a University sermon in Cambridge on the life and work of Sundar Singh, dealing particularly with his conversion. He closed the sermon with this considered judgment:

"A missionary of great experience once said that he had never met a successful evangelist who was not something of a bully and egotist, but there was nothing of that about Sundar Singh; nor of the ecclesiastic either, for he seemed to be equally at home with the members of all denominations. He took little interest in politics, and thought that people wasted time on newspapers which would have been better spent in prayer. He was no theologian, for he thought in pictures rather than in abstract terms, and his faith, rooted in his own experience, was fed by constant study of the Bible: he read few other books, though he knew and appreciated

the *Imitatio Christi*. He showed none of the organizing ability which so distinguished John Wesley, but he was like St. Francis in his continual gaiety and his love for all living creatures. Many who met him were surprised that a man so absorbed in religion could be at the same time so natural and human, obviously ready to be friends and fit in with whatever you were doing, but they could scarcely fail to become aware that he was a man in love with Jesus Christ. If it could be said of any one since St. Paul that he was 'in Christ', that was true of Sundar Singh. No one with whom I have talked has seemed to me so sane, so single-minded, so unconscious of himself, so full of grace and peace, or so holy.<sup>1</sup>

In London Sadhu Sundar Singh was the guest of the Cowley Fathers and preached in St. Matthew's, Westminster (March 9). The church was crowded, visitors sitting in the chancel, on the chancel steps, on the steps of the organ gallery, in the aisles and wherever there was space. The gates were locked before the time announced for the service, as there was no more room.

After the meeting several shook hands with him and thanked him. Many groups of people lingered around if only they might look at his face of serene beauty.

On March 10 he addressed a meeting in Church House. Father Bull, S.S.J.E., and the Secretaries of the S.P.G. and C.M.S., representing the different missionary societies in the Anglican Church, had convened the meeting. The hall was packed to the last inch. Old ladies with ear-trumpets sat in the front rows. Younger ladies with opera glasses sat at the back. On the platform were various clergymen representing all shades of thought and life in the Church of England. The meeting was tense with expectancy. Stories of the conversion of Sadhu Sundar Singh, of the efforts which his own father and the immediate members of the family circle had made to poison him, and the many persecutions which he had undergone for preaching the Gospel in closed lands like Tibet and Nepal had been published in the papers and had stirred the eagerness of the audience to see a man who had suffered so much for Christ.

The theme of the sermon was the difference between preaching and witnessing. The angels can reveal truth, can convey God's message to men, but they cannot witness. Only man can bear witness, for in his own experience he knows what God's love and mercy are. That is why in the Acts of the Apostles we read that an angel spoke to Cornelius but sinful, impetuous, changing Peter gave witness (chapter 10). The Sadhu told his hearers, his eyes burning with conviction, that people who are tired after half an

<sup>1</sup> *The Cambridge Review*, February 19, 1949.

hour's prayer will find it very awkward in heaven where our communion with God will be an eternal experience. Christianity is not professing but possessing. He pleaded: "You must give your hearts and not your hands only to Jesus Christ."

He then addressed an overflow meeting downstairs. Several hundreds were turned away for want of room.

The impression which he left was that of a man apart, rejoicing in the saving grace of Christ and giving his witness with a complete absence of self-consciousness. A writer in the *Church Times* reflected: "Did the clergy, I wondered, see in these thronging thousands a rebuke to their own too frequent failure to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its attractive simplicity? Perhaps they tell themselves it is the strange novelty of the preacher that draws. But they won't believe it—at least not quite."<sup>1</sup>

The *Westminster Gazette* published<sup>2</sup> an interview with him which was widely quoted. He told the journalist that all he carried with him on his journey was a Bible and a blanket. "I have a burden," he said, "if I take gifts from those who press them on me. When I do not take them, then my spirit is free and I feel no burden, for I can look to the Lord."

He was asked why he had come to England. He said with a smile that some Indians alleged that there was no real religion in England but that she sent missionaries to India as a matter of policy.

"I wanted to see for myself," he confessed. "I have found that you are a very busy people, and that you have so much to do that there does not seem much time to think about religion. There is a great deal of materialism. But when I get into your homes and know you, then it is I find that you do really care about religion."

To his friends he explained that there were two further reasons for his visit to the West. He hoped to meet there and to profit by his intercourse with devout Christians. He also felt called to bear witness in the West to the power of Christ.

When in London Sundar Singh called on the Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr. Randall Davidson) in Lambeth Palace.<sup>3</sup> The Archbishop had been reading his life and so received him warmly. In the course of the conversation Sundar Singh said: "If I do not see my mother in heaven, I shall ask God to send me to hell so that I may be with her." He had the greatest affection and respect for his mother as she was a deeply religious woman and he could not believe that God would send her to hell because she was not a Christian. Sundar Singh told the Archbishop of Canterbury that

<sup>1</sup> *The Church Times*, March 12, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> On March 10, 1920.

<sup>3</sup> I also went with him.—A. J. A.

just as there were high caste and low caste in India, so there were High Church and Low Church in the Church of England; Christ Himself would not have made any such difference.

He also told the Archbishop frankly that he was speaking in Anglican Churches and that he had at the same time accepted an invitation from Dr. J. H. Jowett to speak in the Westminster Chapel and another invitation to speak in the Metropolitan Tabernacle, both of them Free Churches. To this the Archbishop replied with a smile, "That is quite all right—for you." Though Sundar Singh did not regard himself as bound by the rules and regulations of the Anglican Church in which he had been baptized and confirmed, he was not hostile to ecclesiastical authority as such. The High Church friend who took him to the Archbishop suggested that he might receive the Archbishop's blessing, which he did, devoutly kneeling before him. The Archbishop was eager to meet him again and, as this was not possible, attended a meeting of the clergy in the Diocese of London presided over by the bishop of the diocese, at which the Sadhu spoke.

In London, Sundar Singh called also on Baron Friedrich von Hügel, the distinguished Roman Catholic theologian and philosopher. He was a deep student of Christian mysticism and his two-volume book on *The Mystical Element in Religion* had become a standard treatise on the subject. When I suggested to him that he might like to meet Sundar Singh, he gladly agreed.

I came to know Baron von Hügel quite well when I was in England. He took a keen interest in young men doing post-graduate work in theology and philosophy. I used to call on him every time I was in London during the vacations. He was an old man in frail health and his hearing was rather poor. He could work only three or four hours a day. He had a beautiful home in Kensington, London, and his study, well lined with books, became quite familiar to me. Though his house was in London he lived the life of a recluse. A devout Catholic, he attended Mass regularly. He was an independent thinker and the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church were inclined to regard him as somewhat of a rebel in their camp. A man of wide learning and broad sympathy, he was often invited by Anglo-Catholics to address their gatherings. He accepted all such invitations whenever his health and time permitted.

The Baron had read through Mrs. Parker's book, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, with his usual thoroughness and had jotted down several questions. A fortnight after the interview he wrote a long memorandum about Sundar Singh and sent it to me. I still treasure it as a document of great value. I should like to give here its leading thoughts.

While the Baron was fully aware of the value of the Sadhu's characteristic contribution to Indian Christianity, he was troubled

by his individualism and pleaded in the memorandum that he should attach himself far more closely to the Christian Church. He held that the Sadhu was departing radically from the classical tradition of Christian mysticism, particularly as it was represented by St. Teresa of Jesus. St. Teresa also had many ecstasies and visions but she did not make them the sole guides in her life. She placed herself under the direction of the ecclesiastical authorities of her day. The Baron felt that the humility of Sundar Singh was not complete until he was willing to accept the authority of the Church more fully than he did.

The Baron said : " I find, then, that the Sadhu is most right, that it is one simply necessary half of his central call and message, in seeking a fully, characteristically, Indian presentation of Christianity. I like to believe that this was the decisive reason for the Sadhu's returning his preaching licence to the Anglican Metropolitan—that he, the Sadhu, felt that he was thus liberating himself from a Church organization which was English, not Indian or International. I like to believe this, although, to do so, I am forced to think that, in spite of the Sadhu's primed assurance of the substantial accuracy of Mrs. Parker's narrative, that good lady has, in her account of the Sadhu's motive for this act of his, allowed herself a description or an emphasis which is really misleading. In the mind of his excellent lady of strongly individualist Protestant mind, the reality of the Sadhu's direct call by God to preach the Gospel somehow dispenses him, *ipso facto*, from all and every church dependence—from subordination to men—'mere' men, she would doubtless say."

The Baron was particularly struck with Sundar Singh's attitude to Indian thought. In the course of the interview he said to Sundar Singh : " I am surprised that you are so free from Pantheism." " In the early stages of my Christian career," said the Sadhu, " I had some leanings towards Pantheism myself. I used to think that the wonderful peace I had was probably the result of my being God or apart of God. But two arguments have removed this doubt : the first that while practising Yoga I did not have that peace ; the second, that occasionally I feel gloom and depression from the consciousness of God abandoning me."<sup>1</sup>

The Baron was impressed by this answer as well as by other things which Sundar Singh said about Indian thought. In the memorandum he made it clear that the Sadhu did not understand by Indian Christianity a Christianity so considerably adapted to Indian thought as to cease to be true to the essential Gospel. The Sadhu's thought had no room whatsoever for Pantheism in it. In his emphasis on Christ who appeared in history and with whom we have personal fellowship, the Sadhu was genuinely Christian. He

<sup>1</sup> B. H. Streeter and A. J. Appasamy, *The Sadhu*, pp. 237, 238.

did not take over wholesale into his Christianity all that was characteristic of Indian philosophy and religion. But he modified it in the light of his Christian experience.

Professor Heiler, commenting on this memorandum, well points out that the Sadhu is not lacking in deepest and truest humility. He is always most respectful to the authorities of the Church. He never seeks to exercise such priestly functions as the administration of the Sacraments. Like his Master who came not to be ministered unto but to minister, he is ready to serve all the churches which invite him. Professor Heiler, therefore, holds that Sundar Singh follows the ideal of humility and creatureliness in an even wider and deeper sense than Friedrich von Hügel had in mind.<sup>1</sup>

In 1925 Professor Heiler wrote a letter to Sundar Singh and asked him what had happened in his interview with Baron von Hügel and what the Sadhu thought of his proposal that he should attach himself far more closely to the Church. To this letter Sundar Singh wrote the following reply :

“ I met F. von Hügel in London in 1920 and he was very kind. I was glad to meet him. Concerning my membership in the Church, I must say that I belong to the Body of Christ, that means, to the true Church which cannot be understood as a building of tiles and stones but as a body of true Christian, living and dead, visible and invisible. But I have nothing against anyone becoming a member of an organized Church on earth. In this sense I am a member of the Church of England in India. I don't believe in the Apostolic Succession, but if this belief is a help to people in their spiritual life then let them believe in it. The true spiritual succession has been interrupted several times, because not all Bishops and Popes were truly consecrated by the Holy Spirit ; many of them were saints but not all. If the living Christ is really so near us and lives in our heart, why then should I reject the true kernel and cling to the dried-up outer shell ?

“ I also believe in the Eucharist and in Baptism. Every Christian indeed has to obey the commands of the Lord concerning these Sacraments, because they are the means of great blessing ; not because the Eucharist becomes the true body of Christ or because there is anything special in Water, Bread or Wine but because of the obedience towards our Lord. Of course, all this depends on faith. With the exception of the Roman Church, I receive the Lord's Supper, the Holy Communion, in every Church.”<sup>2</sup>

On the evening of March 11 his address at St. Bride's Church, Fleet Street, was listened to by a large congregation with eager attention. A journalist who heard him on the occasion wrote thus

<sup>1</sup> F. Heiler, *Apostle Oder Betruget*? p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> p. 22.

of the meeting: "He does not speak English easily, often pausing for a word or correcting his last word, but this, with his obvious earnestness and gesture of hands and head, perhaps increases the attention with which you listen to him. His gestures were all with the right hand, with its powerful, long fingers, with broken nails, said to be the result of the Tibetan experience. His left hand rested on the Bible all the time, moving a little in unison with his body, which swayed a good deal, his head moving emphatically, as though thrusting his argument at your mind. His look of health and sinewy grace, like a fine athlete, increased the impression he gave of an instrument perfected for a purpose. He had one curious gesture, throwing the hand forward with a sweep from off his left shoulder, as though taking the last wrapping from his subject. His voice was hard at first, with a sort of hack in it and a rising vehemence, but always under perfect control as he returned again and again to his refrain: 'May God help us, that our life may be a life of prayer.'

"Prayer was his theme. Prayer was more than asking; it was conversation with God. He had many simple and fresh images. He said that, sitting on the bank of a river, he had seen small fish come to the surface as if to breathe. He was told that they could not live in the bottom of the river without coming up sometimes to breathe. So it was in the world where we were working day and night, where we were working very hard and with many affairs. It was necessary for the soul to breathe. It must come to the surface some time or it would die in the depths.

"It was a strange experience to see this dark face and Eastern garb in London church—possibly the first time in city records that a preacher had come here from the East to refresh the religion of the West. The cold light in the comfortable Wren church, with its gilded plaster rosettes and fat little angels' heads and square brown pews and elaborate sword-rest for the Lord Mayor's sword, made a curious setting to the ascetic Indian, with his saffron wrap.

"The crowd, which listened intently to him, was a microcosm of the city in the daytime. I noticed two notable shipowners, a few Fleet Street traders and the heads of many businesses; many city vicars, too, were there. The women were in the majority of five to one. They were of all classes except the very poor, and there were several Anglican nuns. There was no scene during the sermon or afterwards, nor sign of emotional stress, but nearly every one knelt in prayer at the end—an usual thing in these general congregations—and went out very gravely into the rush of Fleet Street."<sup>1</sup>

On March 15 the Sadhu spoke to five hundred London clergy with the Bishop of London presiding. He was supported on the platform by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of

<sup>1</sup> *Madras Mail*, April 9, 1920.



Southwark. The Bishop of London spoke glowingly of the East and of the spiritual inspiration which it could give the West, describing the Sadhu—much to his consternation—as “a great saint”. Next day the Sadhu addressed a large meeting in the Tottenham Court Road Y.M.C.A., London, admission being strictly by free tickets with a view to eliminating the crowd who were following him around London. He went for a quiet week-end to Brighton, but returned to London very tired as at Brighton he had been obliged to address five meetings.

On March 23 a large gathering of missionaries and secretaries of missionary societies of Great Britain and Ireland came together at the invitation of Dr. J. H. Oldham in Church Missionary House, Salisbury Square, London, to hear him. After his strenuous days of work the Sadhu seemed very tired and did not speak with his usual effectiveness. But he spoke frankly about presenting Christianity to India in an Indian way, and about entrusting Indian Christians with positions of responsibility in missionary administration.

On March 25 the Sadhu left for Paris for a short period of rest and sight-seeing. I went with him. He looked forward to crossing the English Channel on his way to Paris. He stood on the deck and gazed intently at the deep blue sea, with keen delight written on his face. March 26 and 27 were spent in sight-seeing. After coming down from the Eiffel Tower with its three floors he said to me : “You can now say that you have been to the third heaven, like St. Paul.” When he was asked what sights he would like to see, he said, “Things connected with martyrs and the religious life of the country.” In the Louvre, the Art Museum, the only picture which really attracted him was a picture of St. Sebastian pierced by arrows. He afterwards considered that the best picture in the Louvre! It is interesting that the Sadhu was particularly anxious when he was in Paris to see the tomb of Napoleon. He found the chapel closed on both the occasions when he visited it. But he was anxious to know whether and how his body and bones had come from St. Helena. Sundar Singh seemed to show on other occasions a genuine interest in Napoleon. The only explanation which can be offered for this strange interest, so different from his ordinary outlook on life, is that Sundar Singh was deeply impressed by the saying of Napoleon that the empires founded by Alexander, Caesar and himself perished, as they were founded on force, but that the empire of Christ is imperishable as it is founded on love. Monsieur Maller, who came out to India as one of the International Allied Lecturers in connection with the Y.M.C.A., took him in his motor-car and showed him Versailles and the surrounding country. The Sadhu came back pleased with the trip, though he thought that, beautiful as France was, it could not surpass the beauty of the Himalayas.

Some friends who knew of his presence in Paris arranged two meetings for him. At the invitation of Mr. Couve, he spoke in the Mission House of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society. The occasion was a farewell meeting to five missionaries of the Society who were leaving for Africa. The French translation of the Sadhu's *Life* had preceded him and had brought together an expectant crowd. The Sadhu, much the better for his rest, gave his witness for the power of Christ briefly but with his usual vigour. The next day he addressed a drawing-room meeting in Mr. Couve's residence and spoke informally about many of the incidents in his life.

At the drawing-room meeting he told this story. One day while journeying towards a certain village he caught sight of two men in front of him, one of whom suddenly disappeared. A little farther on he overtook the remaining man, who, pointing to a figure on the ground covered with a sheet, told the Sadhu that this was his friend who had died by the way. "I am a stranger here; I pray you, help me with money for his burial." Sundar had only two pice which had been given him for the toll bar of a bridge he was to cross, and his blanket, but these he gave to the man and passed on. He had not gone far when the man came running after him, fell at his feet and sobbed out, "My companion is really dead." The Sadhu did not understand, until he explained that it was their practice to take it in turns to prey on travellers by pretending that one of them was dead. This they had done for years, but that day when the man went back to call his friend there was no response, and on lifting the cloth he was horror-stricken to find him actually dead. "I am very glad," he added naively, "that it was not my turn to play the dead man today." The wretched man, convinced that here was some great saint whom they had robbed of all he had, and thus merited the displeasure of the gods, implored forgiveness of the Sadhu. Then Sundar spoke to him of Christ and how he might obtain forgiveness from Him. "Make me your disciple," said the man. "How can I make you my disciple when I myself am only a disciple?" replied the Sadhu. He allowed the man, however, to accompany him in his wanderings for a while. Later on he sent him to a mission station near Garhwal, where in due time he was baptized.<sup>1</sup>

Sundar Singh returned to England quickly as soon as he felt rested, cutting short his holiday. He could never be idle for long. A pressing invitation was given to him to return to Paris to address some large meetings. This he was never able to do.

On Thursday evening, April 5, he gave an address in Westminster Chapel, London. There was a heavy downpour of rain. Thousands had already left the city for a brief Easter holiday, but a congregation of over 1,500 was present to hear him. Dr. J. H.

<sup>1</sup> B. H. Streeter and A. J. Appasamy, *The Sadhu*, pp. 21, 22.

Jowett, the minister of Westminster Chapel, who was regarded by many as the leading preacher in the English-speaking world at that time, introduced the Sadhu thus : "I feel it an honour of an altogether exceptional kind," he said, "to have beside me in my pulpit a native Christian from India . . . There are some points of difference between us. We differ in dress," said Dr. Jowett with a glance at Sundar Singh's saffron robes. "We differ in colour and in language. I don't know whether I should have as much difficulty in learning his language as he must have had in learning mine, for of all languages I think English must be the most difficult. Whatever be our differences, there is a deeper tie between us in our wonderful experience of redeeming grace."

Dr. Jowett believed that India, with her finely trained and disciplined mind, would have a great contribution to make to Christian literature. "I hope," he said, "that I may live long enough to see the rise of some Indian theologian who will open up to us more fully St. Paul's teaching in the Epistle to the Romans."

The Sadhu took for his text St. Mark 12 : 34—"Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God." "If we give our hearts to Christ," he said, "we shall find the Kingdom of God within us."

"There was a touch of the poetic fancy of Sir Rabindranath Tagore in his parable of the young birds in the shell. Sitting on a Himalayan height, he had looked down on a tree. In the tree was a nest, and on the nest the mother bird was hatching her brood. A wonderful world was waiting for the young birds, the air and sunshine, flowers and mountains. The day was near when they would open their wings and fly whither they would. Now, while living in the shell, they had one need only, that they should receive warmth from the mother. So it is with the Christian. We know not what we shall be, nor what things God hath prepared for them that love Him. Now, while in the body, our great need is to receive heat from the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

After the meeting Sir Evan Spicer met the Sadhu in the vestry and said to him, "When you go back to India will you send here some more Sundar Singhs?"

The next day was Good Friday. On that day he was in the Metropolitan Tabernacle, rendered famous by the long ministry of Spurgeon. The annual convention of the London Federation of Christian Endeavour was being held there. The Rev. Herbert Halliwell, for some time Secretary of All India Christian Endeavour, said that the ordinary Hindu Sadhu suffered for the sake of suffering or for accumulating merit. Sadhu Sundar Singh had dedicated himself to Christ's service. Some people spoke of him as the St. Francis of the East. Others called him a Lover of the

<sup>1</sup> *British Weekly*, April 8, 1920.

Cross. "I am attracted to any man who makes me think of Christ and the Sadhu has made me think of my Master."

When Sundar Singh stood up to speak, the congregation of 5,000 rose to a man and salaamed him in the Indian way, touching the forehead with the right hand. The Sadhu spoke of the three kinds of death which occurred on the first Good Friday—the death *in* sin (of the impenitent sinner), the death *to* sin (of the penitent sinner) and the death *for* sin (of Christ). The short, sharp repetition of the text <sup>1</sup> and especially the words "in paradise" made a deep impression on the congregation. Those with paradise in their hearts, said the Sadhu in conclusion, could not keep silent.

He visited Ireland and then Scotland, speaking in Glasgow and Edinburgh. A Swiss pastor, Kiener of Thierachern, describes Sundar Singh in Edinburgh thus :

"As I saw him there, standing before me, and hear him speak of his spiritual life, while on the other hand I knew that I was surrounded by theological scholars in gown and hood, all at once the question arose in my mind : What are we aiming at, after all, in studying theology ? Why do we learn and study all the hundreds of lesser things, when we do not allow the most important one of all to have its proper place in our lives ? What are we doing with all our apparatus of scholarship, and what have we achieved by it all ? Men like this Indian can move nations. But what do we achieve ?"<sup>2</sup>

His address in an Anglican church in Sheffield was attended by Free Church people and his address in a Congregational church in the same city by High Church people. A friend remarked on that occasion that Church union would come to England from other countries.

In the month of May the Missionary societies hold their annual meetings in London. That year Sundar Singh was the "star" speaker at all the important May meetings. His presence drew immense crowds and there were record attendances.

Sundar Singh's strenuous ministry in England now came to a close. He had to decline over three hundred invitations. He was eager to go to America and bear his witness there to Christ. A letter which an English friend of his wrote to America sums up briefly and frankly the nature of the work which Sundar Singh did in England :

"The question which I understand is raised in some people's mind is as to whether the kind of message that the Sadhu has to give is not too mystical and too purely Oriental to be of value in the West. On this point I think I can reassure you absolutely. His

<sup>1</sup> Probably Luke 23 : 43.

<sup>2</sup> F. Heiler, *The Gospel of Sadhu Sundar Singh*, p. 259.

message is simply personal Christianity, and while his method of preaching it, his illustrations and his mode of thought are Indian, the message itself is simply New Testament Christianity and not either Indian or European or American. I have gone with the Sadhu to big meetings at which he preached, and I have been frankly astonished at the genuinely deep effect produced by his words and by his personality. At the same time I am inclined to feel that it is not the best service we can render to the Sadhu if we employ him mainly for big meetings. He has, it is true, done better in them than I should have dreamed, possibly in view of the fact that his English is still faulty, but he is best of all with small groups or with individuals. I know of a number of definite conversions, among people of all ranks of society over here, due to contact with him, and I do not think it is easy to overestimate the value to our rather hurried, bustling, practical, highly organized and somewhat mundane religion of having a quiet, peaceful and deeply religious personality like the Sadhu meeting with people and bearing his witness.

“I think perhaps one ought to add that the Sadhu is most conscious of a strong desire and call to go to America, and, even had we, who are directing him, felt it right to dissuade him from going to America, I am quite certain that he would not have accepted our views, and you probably know that when he has made up his mind he cannot be shifted. Apart altogether from that, however, I am confident that he will bring spiritual gifts with him and that nobody in America will be other than glad that he had come.”<sup>1</sup>

From the Subathu papers.

## CHAPTER 11

### AMERICA AND AUSTRALIA

1920

SUNDAR SINGH reached New York on May 30, 1920. The Pond Lyceum Bureau, hearing that he was visiting the United States, offered to arrange for a lecture tour. Its agents even sent out some preliminary announcements. They had arranged previously a successful lecture tour for Rabindranath Tagore, and they were confident that Sundar Singh's lecture tour would draw even better and larger audiences. But when he realized that the Lyceum Bureau was a business concern, intent on making large sums of money for him as well as for itself, he declined to work under its auspices.

Dr. F. N. D. Buchman, who in after-years founded the Oxford Group Movement and later the Moral Rearmament Movement, organized Sundar's tour in the United States and himself accompanied him during the first part of the tour. At that time Dr. Buchman was a lecturer on Personal Work in the Theological Seminary in Hartford, Connecticut.

Dr. W. Douglas Mackenzie, President of Hartford Seminary Foundation, and eight other religious leaders of Hartford, sent out on June 3, 1920, an invitation to Sundar Singh's meeting in which they said :

" Dean Colladay has arranged that he should address a meeting to be held in Christ Church on Friday next, June 11th, at eight o'clock. The Sadhu is a remarkable and significant person in the Christian world today. He is specially anxious to counteract the influence of the many Swamis and other people who have been over in Europe and America trying to capture certain types of mind for Theosophy, Hindu Mysticism, etc. We have people like that in Hartford, and perhaps if you help to make this meeting widely known from your pulpit on Sunday next some of these people may be reached by the message of this striking personality."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From the Subathu papers.

On June 11, 1920, Dr. Buchman wrote to his friend Henry Hobson of Cambridge, Mass. :

" On Saturday, June 19th, at 4-30 o'clock, in the Church of the Cowley Fathers on Bowdoin Street, Boston, Sadhu Sundar Singh will speak. I am very keen to have you hear him. A number of men, just worldly men, have said this last week that he was nearer the Christ than any man they have ever met. He spoke at the Hill School, and Mrs. John said every boy that left that building had a veil of light across his face. It is Peter and Paul. I have travelled with him for two weeks, and he spells reality. He has a message for material America. I hope Edmonia and you can come."<sup>1</sup>

One noon, in an upper room in New York City, a group of twelve Christian laymen gathered with the Sadhu for conference and prayer. One of the group asked him : " Have you any followers in India, any who imitate your way of life ? " The Sadhu replied after a moment of silence :

" No. I have no followers, I am myself a follower of Christ."<sup>2</sup>

He said to a reporter in New York : " I believe entirely in the actual power of Christ, now as in the days of His life on earth, to heal and work what men are pleased to know as 'miracles.' I believe not only because of faith, but because of experience. The laying on of hands is unnecessary. That might be partly magnetism, partly personal. Prayer is all that is needed for healing. The time of ' fate ' has passed ; the time for miracles continues. Christ can work through people who are close to him. Before I was a Christian I thought miracles were fiction, stories, fairy tales. Now I know all things are possible. I thought then they were against the ' law of nature.' But what do we know of the ' laws of nature ' ? I have seen supposedly incurable diseases cured by prayer, my prayers joined with the prayers of the sick people."

In the same interview, he went on to say : " Sects are strange, unnecessary things. There is one God ; why have so many creeds ? Peace and quiet come from knowing Christ. Why cause dissension afterwards ? But still . . . "

" This is the world," he said resignedly, " though never without joy. When all sects are one, it will be the world no longer. It will be heaven. "

A writer in *The New York City Sun* was much impressed by his scanty luggage. He wrote that Sundar had really solved the baggage problem ! He carried only a small yellow leather kit-bag in which he tucked his extra costume—a saffron coloured robe—and a Bible. With this little bag he was ready for a six-months' tour to any part

<sup>1</sup> From the Subathu papers.

<sup>2</sup> *Truth*, April 1945.

of the world. The Sadhu did his own laundering. He washed his robe in a hotel bowl and hung it up to dry on a clothes stand.<sup>1</sup>

Sundar Singh preached in the Church of the Holy Trinity in Philadelphia and said: "America is too busy a country to promote religion; its hustle and bustle keeps men's minds on material things and prevents them from giving sufficient time to prayer. If you expect to go to heaven when you die you must begin in this life by cultivating 'heavenly habits' and 'heavenly traits.' Prayer is the surest method of cultivating these heavenly habits. A great many Americans appear to be too busy to give the matter much attention. Lack of prayer is dangerous to a man's soul."<sup>2</sup>

In *The Missionary Review of the World* for April 1922, a writer—Belle M. Brain—gave an account of Sundar's work at Silver Bay for four days from June 25 in a Students' Conference.

"Though the Sadhu attended many meetings in America and gave many strong addresses, nowhere did his likeness to Christ show forth more vividly than at the Student Conference at Silver Bay on Lake George in June 1920. It was especially notable at a vesper service held one evening on the stone steps, a hallowed spot dear to many.

"As he stood facing his audience, clad in his saffron robe, the scars of the leeches on his arms and the look of God on his face, the lake back of him and the mountains beyond lighted by the last rays of the setting sun, it was hard to realize that the lake was not Galilee, the time not A.D. 33, and the striking figure not that of the Lord Jesus. When he spoke the spell was not broken, for his teaching was in simple stories, rich in spiritual truth, such as the Lord himself might have used.

"While at Silver Bay the Sadhu gave an estimate of America that should send us to our knees and stir us to action. The burden of one address was the danger of being near the Kingdom but not in it. This was emphasized by the parable of 'The Wise and Foolish Virgins' and his own parable of 'The Hunter's Lodge'. The hunter was pursued by a tiger but had no fear because there was a hut nearby to which he thought he had the key. On reaching it, however, the key was missing and although there was only the thickness of the door between him and safety, yet he was lost.

"To a little group that talked with him afterwards he said that, so far as he had been able to judge, a great many of the so-called Christians of America, though full of good works, are like the hunter, almost saved, but lost. 'Unless some great leader arises' he added, 'America is doomed.'

<sup>1</sup> *The New York City Sun*, June 11, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> *The Philadelphia Ledger*.



“What think ye of Sundar Singh—this devoted man of God who in this strange twentieth century is living so much like Christ? Can it be that God has raised him up not only to show forth a new way of winning India but to lead us all back to the simplicity of apostolic days when there was little in the way of organization, but God was in power and souls were added daily to the Church?”

In the same article a serious criticism was made of his visions and ecstasies.

“Like other famous mystics, the Sadhu has ecstatic visions that are a source of refreshment to him but are perplexing to many Christians. Like the Apostle Paul he has been in visions ‘caught up into the third heaven’ where he hears things not known on earth. Unlike Paul, he has confided some of these things to his friends, Canon Streeter and Mr. Appasamy, and they have written them down in a book (*The Sadhu*), and some of the ‘revelations’ as there recorded do not accord either with the Scriptures or with his own teachings given in other places.

“Many critics of the book, which is otherwise very inspiring, are inclined to think that the editors, who are liberal theologians, have influenced the Sadhu somewhat. ‘Many of the conclusions Canon Streeter has drawn in his book show the influence of his own views,’ says Dr. Velte of the Presbyterian Mission at Saharanpur, India, ‘and we believe the Sadhu himself would be the first to repudiate them. At any rate these are not the central things in his life and they have no place in his message. We love to think of him as a humble, earnest, devoted witness to Christ, who, as he passes through India, attracts souls like a magnet.’”

For several years Sundar Singh had been the friend of Miss Mary J. Campbell, a missionary of the United Presbyterian Church of America. She became a Secretary of the World Christian Temperance Union and travelled over the whole of India. Sundar Singh wrote numerous letters to her but they are not available for this book. It is not known whether they are extant and where. In the course of his journey across the United States, Sundar Singh visited her brother, Frank J. Campbell, in his home in Topeka, Kansas. A reporter from *The Topeka State Journal* called on him and published an account of him in that journal on July 10, 1920. In his interview, Sundar Singh said :

“Looking at the motto ‘In God We Trust’ on the American dollar one might think the Americans are a very religious people, but the motto should read, ‘In the dollar we trust’. Americans are seeking the almighty dollar, not the Almighty God.

“I do not come to christianize America. I come only to testify to what Christ has done for me. America is already a Christian

nation. But although there are many sincere Christians in America, the majority of the people here have no religion. Here where it is so easy to have religion, where religion is offered on every side and no one is persecuted for being a Christian, life should be peaceful and happy because of that religion. Instead, there is a rush and a hustle and bustle after money and comfort and pleasure with little thought of religion. In India, Christians suffer bitter persecution but continue to find happiness in their new religion. Because it is so easy to have faith in this country, Americans do not appreciate what a comfort there is in religion. At one time the ostrich could fly, but because the ostrich did not ever use his wings he became unable to fly. So the people here do not appreciate the religious faith of their fathers, and are losing it."

Here are some sayings of Sundar Singh while in America :

"Communion with God means God in us and we in God. Yet this does not destroy our individuality. If the iron is in the fire there will soon be fire in the iron. But the iron does not become fire, nor does the fire become iron."

"I belong to no denomination. I am a simple Christian. Denominationalism becomes 'quarrelism'."

"We must be able to drink the milk of the Gospel; if we analyse it, we spoil the milk."

"The Christian worker must be as salt, which must be dissolved before it can become effective; the force of an appeal lies in self-sacrifice."

"We live in a sinful world, and yet if we have Jesus in our hearts we shall not be contaminated by sin; just as a fish living in salt water does not itself become salt."<sup>1</sup>

On September 23, 1920, Dr. Buchman wrote to Mrs. Parker giving her an over-all picture of Sundar Singh's work in the United States.

"His ministry in America was a short one, but he toured from the East to the West and touched many circles. The leading newspapers in New York gave him ample space. He was able to get in touch with influential student and lay circles in different cities. He is led by the Spirit and possesses a gift for sensing men and situations almost like a medium.

"He brings the message of the supernatural which is needed by this age. His accounts of miraculous deliverances enlighten the pages of the Bible. Certain leading religious personalities in the States were afraid of him and his tour. They represented the modernistic 'new theology' and tried to explain every 'miracle'.

<sup>1</sup> The first two sayings have been taken from *Truth*, April 1945. The rest have been quoted from the *Literary Digest* for July 3, 1920.

These people were surprised when they saw how receptive the students of the exclusive Eastern universities were to his message. They remarked : ' We could not imagine that a message like this would go through the world.' The people simply streamed to him, so that he had hardly time for his meals. In Boston he was introduced by an outstanding clergyman as ' the second best known Christian after the Holy Father himself '. The book about him has had a good sale. You have done a helpful service in editing it.

" The only thing we noticed in him was a lack of adaptability, and a shyness which prevented him from exploiting a situation.

" It is true when he said America would in fifty years' time have no real spiritual leaders if it went on at the present pace. . . .

" I personally feel that we need such messengers from the East to visit us in the West and I would be glad if I could be helpful in bringing the Sadhu for a longer tour back to the States. "1

Sundar Singh sailed from San Francisco on July 20, 1920. There were no direct steamers from San Francisco to India, so he decided to return home via Honolulu, Samoa and Australia. He arrived unexpectedly in the Australian city of Sydney.

On August 7, 1920, seven hundred clergy and Christian workers, particularly those interested in missions, assembled in the Chapter House of St. Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney to hear Sundar Singh. The midday intercessions in the Pitt Street Church were led by the Rev. Norman J. Cocks and other Free Church Ministers with an address by Sundar Singh. For both these meetings the audiences overflowed.

On August 12, 1920, a writer said in *The Daily Telegraph* of Sydney :

" The secret of this man's power, it has been declared, lies in his utter abandonment to a high ideal. He will tell you that he has given his life to Another, and that that Other One daily and hourly directs him and deigns to use him. The Sadhu has sought the great ideal of renunciation, and has transfigured it by a Christian interpretation of it. Not suffering for suffering's sake, much less for merit—he is glad to suffer for his Master's sake. And undoubtedly he has suffered much. The college graduates of Madras and Calcutta call him ' St. Francis of the East ', but the common people who meet him in their villages call him ' The Apostle of the Bleeding Feet '."

Miss C. Fraser of the *New South Wales Presbyterian Newspaper* wrote to me in July 1951 : " DO YOU REMEMBER THE SADHU ? Yes, indeed I do,—the crowded meetings, the truly Indian figure, the

<sup>1</sup> F. Heiler, *Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*, pp. 236, 237.

slightly hesitating English, but the simplicity of speech and quietness of mind and manner that proved to be a vehicle for messages from God. He spoke of miracles,—‘not possible, they will tell you. But have you seen a bridge of water over water? Not possible, you say? But I have seen in the high mountains a river frozen,—a thick bridge of ice,—with the flowing stream still coming underneath. Bridge of water, over water,—a miracle.’ He spoke of travelling into Tibet and being hung by his feet to a tree. ‘I was indignant, indeed I was angry as I hung there. But I thought of the picture that is shown by a lantern. The slide is put in upside down, but by the arrangement of reflectors and light the picture comes out right side up. So I thought in the light of God even my suffering must come out right side up.’ ”

Miss Dorothy Read has sent me (June 1951) her reminiscence : “As I read your request for impressions of the visit of Sadhu Sundar Singh in 1920, I saw once again the old History Lecture Room of Sydney University. What was actually said I have forgotten but not the absolute serenity of the speaker, who came in so unobtrusively, was introduced, and then captured the hearts and spirits of his hearers, the typical students of a university group. It is nothing of value I can send, but I felt I should like to pay this tribute to one whose spirit is so needed in all the rush and tension of this 1951 of ours.”

The Rev. J. H. Deane, Principal of the New Zealand Bible Training Institute of Auckland, wrote to me in December 1951 :

“I was then in my final year at the Sydney University and met and conducted the Sadhu round the University, introduced him to the Christian group that had then been formed, and had him speak to the students who cared to assemble and hear him.

“He was a unique figure, dressed in his saffron robe and wearing sandals, with an unwrinkled, radiant face, full bearded, with a certain calm and majesty of countenance. He seemed to me, as a young Christian, the nearest that I could imagine our Lord looked like. He spoke quietly but with obvious spiritual power; and he spoke simply, with constant reference to the common things to be found in nature to illustrate the profoundest spiritual truths.

“He certainly made a deep impression on the students of that day, and there are ineffaceable memories of him written in my own mind.”

From Sydney Sundar went on to Melbourne, where he spent a week. When he preached in the Cathedral a congregation of over 3,000 people heard him. He also spoke in some of the largest churches. In one Congregational church the chair was taken by an

Anglican Bishop, Sundar Singh said about this meeting : " I think this is the first time an Anglican Bishop has presided or taken part in a service in a non-conformist church."

The Rev. Austin James of the Methodist Church, now a missionary in India at Azamgarh, has sent me a reminiscence (November 1951) :

" It happened that at that time I was a student of Queen's College in the University of Melbourne, and I remember the Sadhu's visit and have a clear picture of his appearance. Unfortunately he was not always easy to follow and so after all these years I haven't any real recollection of what he said. Yet I remember him standing before a large audience of students in the Melba Hall and I remember well the powerful impression he left on us of rugged manliness and gentleness, of devotion and purity. Not only did he look like a Bible character, but he made us feel that he had walked with our Lord. During that same year three people from India made a deep impression on me. One was a missionary of our own Church, the Rev. J. H. Allen ; another was Srinivasa Sastri with his wonderful oratory ; but it was Sundar Singh who clinched the matter and brought me to India."

Sundar Singh was in Adelaide on September 3, 1920, his thirty-first birthday. As the guest of Mr. Stow Smith at Fullarton Estate he had the opportunity of meeting a number of Adelaide workers in the interest of missionary endeavour in India, and answered the questions they put to him concerning conditions in that country. It was made clear that he had refused to identify himself with any one church or society, because he had felt that to do so might limit the appeal he was capable of making to his fellow countrymen. All Christian leaders were reported to have honoured his decision.

Mr. Stow Smith, with whom Sundar Singh stayed in Adelaide, wrote to me in July 1951 : " Although it is thirty years ago I vividly recall the indescribable spiritual influence which the Sadhu's presence created through our home. His calm, quiet, and majestic demeanour, together with the beauty and serenity of an unruffled face, convinced one of his constant communion with his Lord.

" Inscribed in my wife's Bible on the 3rd of September, 1920, over the signature of Sadhu Sundar Singh, are the familiar words of the Apostle Paul :

' Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit '

Ephesians vi. 18.

It is with pleasure I send this brief impression of my personal contact with a most remarkable and saintly man ; who impressed one that he, like Enoch of old, ' walked with God '."

Sundar Singh was in Perth on September 7, 1920. From the *West Australia* of that date I quote the following account :

“ It would be a difficult task to analyse the various feelings which prompted hundreds of city people today to give up their luncheon hour to attend at Queen’s Hall to hear Sadhu Sundar Singh, the visiting Christian Indian. The Sadhu had received but scant publicity, although what references had appeared had probably created in the minds of the public an impression of religious mysticism from which something extraordinary might be expected. . . . What they heard was the simple testimony of the Sadhu’s conversion to Christianity. It was a simple story simply told, yet it carried the unmistakable conviction of a personal experience which sounded like the testimony of an apostle.”

The meetings in Australia were so largely attended that the doors of churches had often to be closed three-quarters of an hour before the time announced for the service. Sundar Singh wrote, “ I am having overflow meetings. Very often I have to speak a second time after I have finished speaking to one audience. On account of the language it is very hard to speak in another meeting immediately. But the Holy Spirit enables me to do this for His glory.”<sup>1</sup>

*The Christian Patriot*, October 9, 1920.

## CHAPTER 12

### MAN OF PRAYER

IN September, Sundar Singh left Freemantle for Bombay. He wrote asking Mr. Vincent David to meet him there, and instructed him to keep the matter of his coming secret, for he disliked the idea of an enthusiastic reception after his work in the West, which had attracted so much attention.

Mr. David wrote in *The Christian Patriot* of October 9, 1920 :

“ Our dearest brother Sadhu Sundar Singh landed in Bombay safe and sound on the 24th of September . . . On Sunday afternoon the Sadhu told the Rev. R. Deshpande and myself about his work in England, America and Australia and his opinion about those places.

“ He said many Englishmen of the present-day did not believe in the miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ, and when they asked him questions concerning the miracles, the Sadhu answered them and added that he saw a miracle wrought amongst them because, in spite of the English people being so materialistic, there were many spiritual people among them. . . . There is a good deal of Christianity in America but that is not enough. Just as a thirsty man can not quench his thirst even if he is drowned in sea water, because the sea water is salty, in the same way a spiritually thirsty man cannot quench his thirst in America because it is saturated with materialism. Our Lord’s words, ‘ Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden and I will give you rest,’ are true as regards the East, but the Sadhu thinks that as for America our Lord would say ‘ Come unto me all ye that are heavy gold-laden and I will give you rest.’

“ Still, God has His own witnesses in the West and all over the world. Sometimes young Indians say that they do not want missionaries from such places ; but that is a mistake. The Sadhu thinks that the missionaries from the West who come to India keep alive the churches at home, and, if the West did not send its missionaries, very soon their churches would become dead like the Dead Sea. So we should welcome the missionaries for the sake of keeping Christianity alive in the West.

“The Sadhu’s experience is that no country or nation in this world is Christian. It is individuals who are Christians—individuals who live and are in touch with Jesus Christ. His meetings were a great help to the missionaries because many who were against the missionaries are now ready to help and many are actually helping. A very rich man in England said to the Sadhu, ‘If, after spending thousands of pounds, I had been able to convert only one soul like you, Sundar Singh, I would have felt satisfied, but I have had no share in your conversion.’ And now the same rich man is helping the missionaries.

“It was very remarkable that when Sadhu Sundar Singh spoke in a Congregational church in Melbourne, the Anglican Bishop—Bishop Langley—presided and one of the leading men in Melbourne said: ‘Sadhu Sundar Singh, I do not know if you are doing anything in India for Church Union but you have started it in Australia.’ After a meeting in Sydney a high official came and shook hands with the Sadhu and said: ‘I had the honour of shaking hands with the Prince of Wales and now I have the honour of shaking hands with a Prince of Paradise’; to this the Sadhu replied that every Christian who is in Christ is a Prince of Paradise.

“Our dear brother Sadhu Sundar Singh says, ‘I have not finished my tour in Europe but, God willing, after visiting Tibet next year, if God opens the way I might again go to places where people so earnestly invited me; namely, Sweden, Switzerland, etc. . . . I cannot but be very thankful to all my Christian brothers and sisters in India for the great help they gave me by their prayer—the fruit of which is the wonderful blessing on the meetings and the many conversions.’”

Vincent David told me (February 1950): “In January 1921 Sundar Singh invited me to spend a few days with him at Subathu, which I did. When I went out with him through the village, I had occasion to observe the very great regard in which he was held by the local people. The petty merchants would come out of their shops and respectfully greet him with clasped hands. The Sadhu would return their greeting with a smile and perhaps a word or two.

“When the sun came up in the morning, we sometimes took our chairs outside the house and began reading the New Testament. He read his Urdu New Testament and I the English. . . . He may spend fifteen or twenty minutes meditating on one verse. . . .

“Sundar Singh presented to me the Urdu New Testament which he had been using for three years. All the pages had been copiously marked with a blue pencil and the covers were coming to pieces, showing how often and how much he had used the book. I found in it some delicate fern leaves which he had pressed into it.



I know with what joy he admired and loved the exquisite delicacy of such fern leaves. He used to tell me: 'Can any human hands make such beautiful leaves? God creates them and leaves them in profusion in the open valleys.' . . .

" He never sat for his prayer outside, where men could see him. He entered his room, closed the door and prayed to his Father in secret. For hours his door would be closed and if I had any business with him I would peep in through the glass window to see whether he was still in prayer or whether he was free. My impression was that he generally spent about four to six hours daily in prayer, though one cannot always be sure of such things. He sat cross-legged, his palms gently joined together in worship. Not a muscle would move. This impressed me particularly. His body was completely under his control and for long stretches of time there would not be even a single movement.<sup>1</sup> There was another thing I always observed about his devotions. Whenever he came out of these spells of prayer—during which he was completely oblivious of the need for food—there was a light on his face which stirred in me a feeling of awe and I would hesitate to go near him and move with him familiarly. In his room at that time there were two large pictures of Christ—one as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and another as He preached the Sermon on the Mount. Even when writing his letters or his books, he would often gaze on these pictures long and intently.


" The Sadhu narrated to me some of his experiences in the world of spirits. Once he asked how many Roman Catholics there were in the spiritual world. The answer was, 'None'. He asked further how many members of the Church of England there were; to this also the same negative reply was given. He went on to ask how many Methodists, how many Presbyterians and how many Baptists there were and he was told, 'None at all'. He was greatly puzzled and bewildered, and asked, 'Who then are here?' The answer came, 'They are all Christians.' . . .

" When I was at Subathu, Sundar Singh knocked at my door early in the morning one day and said eagerly, 'I have got the solution.' I did not understand what he meant and I said to him, 'Sadhuji, what is this you are saying? What solution?' He explained that he had received a question from a Theological Seminary in America on which his opinion had been sought. He had been thinking about it a good deal and the answer had now come to him. The question he had been asked was, 'If everything happens according to the will of God, what is the object of prayer? Whether we pray or not, whatever is going to occur will occur.' The Sadhu said that the answer had come to him from a nest of eggs. Through

<sup>1</sup> Sundar Singh was probably in ecstasy at such times.

his window he had observed a bird's nest on a tree day after day. In the eggs there was a liquid, the mother bird was sitting on the eggs patiently and continuously and the liquid was being transformed into the image of the mother. The Holy Spirit likewise changes our will until it becomes one with the will of God : God does not change through our prayer, but we change."

I have already referred to the book about Sundar Singh entitled *The Sadhu*, which was published in England in April 1921. This was written jointly by Canon B. H. Streeter, the Oxford theologian, and myself. Thoughtful people in different parts of the world began to take him seriously after reading this book. It sought to give a restrained and accurate picture of Sundar Singh and to interpret him in terms which well-educated people in the West could understand.

Par  dar Singh's friends, Mr. Alfred Zahir and Mrs. Arthur had written books about him which had been circulated widely. In these books the external events in the life of Sundar Singh had been described, often too glowingly. Both Canon Streeter and I were convinced that behind his life of service and adventure, which the other books had described and which had attracted much popular attention, there must be a deep life of prayer and meditation. By questioning him closely and persistently for several days during his two visits to Oxford in 1920 we were able to gather from him a good many valuable facts concerning his inner life. The reader must go to that book for a detailed account of the life of prayer and meditation which Sundar Singh led. Here I may sum up briefly the account given there.

As a wandering evangelist it was not possible for him to have absolutely regular habits of Bible study and prayer. He sought to spend daily at least two hours of prayer in the early morning from five to seven. When he had leisure he extended these two hours to three or four. On occasions he spent even whole days or whole nights in solitary communion with God. He started the day by reading a chapter of the Bible, at first rapidly and then returning to the more suggestive verses and lingering over them as long as he thought that his meditation was proving fruitful. Then he spent fifteen or more minutes in recollection. Then, as he described it, the Holy Spirit Himself taught him what to pray for, both for himself and for others.

Intercession was an important part in the Sadhu's prayer. He told us that he had a list of two or three hundred god-children. When he was on his preaching tours he did not find time to pray for them. But when he was on the Himalayas, with considerable stretches of time at his disposal, he prayed for them all. He told us that once he was praying for a particular person. For a long time

it looked as if his prayer was not being answered. But after eight years that prayer was heard.<sup>1</sup>

We asked him about his practice with regard to Holy Communion. He stayed with Christians of all churches. Sometimes he lived with High Anglicans who attended daily Mass, and at other times with Free Churchman who celebrated the Lord's Supper once a month. He took part in the Lord's Supper according to the habits of the people with whom he stayed. He told us, "If I had the time, I would like to partake of it every day. I get great benefit from it." But it was clear to us that his own awareness of the presence of the Living Christ was quite independent of his participation in the Eucharist.

For the first time in his life he disclosed to the public through us that he frequently attained a state of ecstasy and saw many visions. He said that he did not generally speak of these experiences because people would not understand what he meant without long and elaborate explanations. In this he held he was following the example of St. Paul who spoke of what he saw in the Third Heaven as if it had not been his own but somebody else's, saying "I know a man in Christ who . . ." This was because St. Paul realized that if he had spoken of these experiences as his own he might have been subjected to foolish and curious questions and even after long explanations he might have been misunderstood. Sundar Singh believed that this experience of ecstasy was the same as St. Paul's Third Heaven. It was with much hesitation and reluctance that Sundar Singh described to us his ecstatic experiences, which place him in the company of the mystics of the Christian Church.

There are many important features of Sundar Singh's ecstasy :

1. His ecstasies were of frequent occurrence. During the latter years of his life he was in the habit of experiencing them as many as ten times in a month. He said to us, "I never try to go into ecstasy ; nor do I advise other people to try. It is a gift to be accepted, but it should not be sought ; if given, it is a pearl of great price. During the fourteen years of my life as a Sadhu there have been many times when, suffering from hunger, thirst or persecution, I might have been tempted to give it up but for the gift of these times of ecstasy, but these I would not give up for the whole world."<sup>2</sup>

2. In all his visions there was a constant background, which he described thus : ' Christ on His throne is always in the centre, a figure ineffable, and indescribable. The face as I see it in ecstasy, with my spiritual eyes, is very much the same as I saw it at my conversion with my bodily eyes. He has scars with blood flowing

<sup>1</sup> B. H. Streeter and A. J. Appasamy, *The Sadhu*, pp. 93, 94.

<sup>2</sup> p. 109.

from them. The scars are not ugly but glowing and beautiful. He has a beard on His face. The long hair on His head is like gold, like glowing light. His face is like the sun, but its light does not dazzle me. It is a sweet face, always smiling—a loving, glorious smile. Christ is not terrifying at all.

“ And all around the throne of Christ, extending to infinite distances, are multitudes of glorious spiritual Beings. Some of them are saints, some of them angels. These are indistinguishable. ‘ The difference,’ they told me, ‘ is not important : we are all one here.’ They all look like younger brothers of Christ. They are all glorified, but His glory is far more glorious than their glory, and they differ among themselves in degree of glory, something like a difference of colour, but not quite that. Their clothes are, as it were, made of light, not dazzling but many-coloured. There are more colours there than in this world. There is nothing here so beautiful, not even diamonds and precious stones. When they speak to me they put their thoughts into my heart in a single moment, just as on earth one sometimes knows what a person is going to say before he says it. I did not have to learn the language of the spiritual world. When we leave the body and enter that world, we speak it as easily and naturally as a new-born baby breathes the moment it enters this world, though it has not done such a thing before.

“ In these visions we have most wonderful talks. This is the real Communion of Saints which is spoken of in the Apostles’ Creed. We talk about spiritual things, and problems which no one here can solve. This good company solves them easily. . . . Another feature of that world is, that one never gets tired of it, one never wants something different. In this world one gets tired after three or four hours even at times of the highest experience of peace, but one never tires in the heavenly world.”<sup>1</sup>

3. The main themes of his visions while in ecstasy were resurrection, judgment, heaven and hell. These subjects attracted him continually. He was always pondering on them. He was fully convinced that while he was in a state of ecstasy God shed new light on them for his benefit. The chapter in this biography entitled ‘ Visions of the Spiritual World ’ contains some examples of his visions on these themes.

4. In the state of ecstasy he was capable of concentrated thought, clearer and more continuous than in his ordinary life. “ Ecstasy is a waking, not a dream state. I can think in it steadily. At normal times the flow of my thoughts is disturbed by distractions, but not in the ecstatic state. Generally a thought remains in my mind only for a minute, being quickly followed by other thoughts ; whereas in the state of ecstasy I am able to think for a

<sup>1</sup> B. H. Streeter and A. J. Appasamy, *The Sadhu*, pp. 117, 119.

long time on the same subject. I am inclined to believe that this is because in that state the mental activities are no longer impeded by the material brain."<sup>1</sup>

5. Sundar Singh repeatedly affirmed the ineffable character of his ecstatic experience. "There is no language which will express the things which I see and hear in the spiritual world ; I am like a dumb man who can taste and enjoy the sweets that are given to him, but cannot express or explain it to others."<sup>2</sup>

6. When he was in a state of ecstasy he was entirely oblivious of the outer world. Once he went into ecstasy under a tree. He had been stung all over with hornets and his body was all swollen but he had felt nothing. On one occasion while at his morning prayers which began at five o'clock he involuntarily entered the ecstatic state. He had been announced to speak at a public meeting at eight o'clock. He was unconscious of the passage of time and did not go to the meeting. The people who came went away disappointed, wondering what had happened to him. He was very sorry about this and was extremely careful in after-years not to "slip" into ecstasy (to use his own phrase) when that might make him forgetful of his engagements.

7. Sundar Singh further maintained that after ecstasy he felt greatly refreshed, both physically and spiritually. "If it happens to me when I am physically strained and tired out, or, as I recollect on more than one occasion, when I am feeling despondent because people have refused to listen to my preaching, the result is that I feel completely refreshed and invigorated. This is another of the reasons which proves to me that it is not an ordinary trance. When I used to practise Yoga there was no permanent refreshment, though the trance might be temporarily comforting. Indeed the great contrast between the state of ecstasy and the Yogic states which I cultivated before becoming a Christian lies in the fact that in ecstasy there is always the same feeling of calm satisfaction and being at home, whatever had been my state of my mind before going into ecstasy. Whereas in the Yogic state, if before the trance I was feeling sad, I used to weep in the trance, if cheerful I would smile. Also after ecstasy I always feel strengthened, invigorated and refreshed. This result did not follow Yoga."<sup>3</sup>

Wordsworth's lines on Tintern Abbey describe well Sundar Singh's experience in ecstasy :

" . . .another gift  
Of aspect more sublime ; that blessed mood,  
In which the burden of the mystery,

<sup>1</sup> B. H. Streeter and A. J. Appasamy, *The Sadhu*, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> pp. 140, 141.

<sup>3</sup> pp. 135, 136.

*In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
Is lightened : that serene and blessed mood,  
In which the affections gently lead us on,  
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame  
And even the motion of our human blood  
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul :  
While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things."*

Modern psychology of religion has paid much attention to the meaning of visions. There are radical psychologists who say that these visions are purely subjective and possess no value whatsoever. A man sees whatever he wishes to see. But psychologists who are religious themselves, and who feel convinced that religion has objective validity, say that while it is true that visions have a subjective element, their inner content has real significance. A man who is artistically inclined sees in moments of prayer, when his spirit is alert, certain profound truths set out in a picturesque form. This form may be purely of his own making. But if we believe in an Eternal Spirit and if we believe that this Eternal Spirit communes with our human spirits, we cannot but agree that the truths which are conveyed in such a setting are indeed given by God. Visions are important because they are vivid and clear. They make the devotee realize, with absolute certainty, profound truths about God and man.

All visions are not necessarily true. They must be put to intellectual and practical tests. We must find out whether they cohere with the rest of our understanding of Reality, and we must also find out what practical consequences they lead to. If the man who claims to see visions lives just like other men, the visions cannot be of any great value. But if they fill him with spiritual desires and make him pure and unselfish, they are indeed of great significance. The visions of Sundar Singh made a new man of him. They filled him with a deep tranquillity. They made him brave dangers. They drew him close to God and Christ. That is why Sundar Singh will probably join the distinguished company of saints whose memory is an unailing source of inspiration to succeeding generations.

At this time Sundar Singh went on another evangelistic tour to Tibet. Here is a shortened version of his own account of that tour :

"I started for Tibet from Subathu at the beginning of May 1921, going via Simla to Kotgarh. Here I was joined by Mr. Wright, who had some knowledge of the Tibetan language. . . .

“ We experienced great difficulty at the Rotang Pass. On the 20th and 31st May there was a fall of snow and the cold became intense. The day we crossed over it, snow was falling. The cold was so severe that it changed the colour of our skin to a blue-black, and after that the skin began to peel off. We managed, however, to keep going, praying as we went. . . .

“ From the Rotang Pass we went via Sissu and Gandhla to Kyelang. Here the Moravian missionaries have laboured for many years among the Tibetans. There is a Christian community of about fifty all told, and they arranged a meeting for us at which I preached. . . . But here Mr. Wright became seriously ill and we were compelled to retrace our steps. He could not stand the high altitudes and cold which, because I am accustomed to hardships, did not give me much trouble. Mr. Wright returned to Simla, while I, in company with a young Tibetan Christian, returned to Tibet by another route. I received great help in the work from this young man.

“ The Lamas occasionally opposed us but the people generally listened to us very attentively. We visited some hermits in their retreats, who did not care to talk much but promised to read the Gospel portions we gave them. . . .

“ There are many dangers to be encountered in travelling through Tibet. Persons whom the traveller may meet are often wandering bandits. . . . The wild yak and bloodthirsty wolves are also encountered.

“ One day I had gone on ahead leaving my companion behind, when I suddenly saw a wild yak charging in my direction. As there were no trees in that wilderness, there seemed to be no escape for me. I saw a high rock, however, and managed to reach it before the yak was upon me. The enraged yak pawed the ground in his fury and kept going around my rock of refuge. . . . By this time my companion and some others came in sight and began shouting at the yak. By throwing stones at it and wounding it they succeeded in frightening it away, but the noise brought to the spot some bandits who lived in near-by caves and we were compelled to go with them. We had escaped from wild beasts, but had fallen into the hands of wild men ! In my experience I have had less trouble from wild animals than from wild men.

“ The robbers proceeded to take everything we had, but we were grateful that the lives of all were spared. On finding a suitable opportunity, I preached the Gospel to them, which through the influence of God's Spirit so touched their hearts that within an hour they restored to us all our things. Taking me to be a Christian Lama, they prepared a special cup of tea for me flavoured with salt and butter. We first praised and thanked God that He had 'prepared a table before us in the presence of our enemies'.

“ Then came a further difficulty, for the cup into which my tea was about to be poured was very dirty. I said : ‘ If you please I should like first to clean this cup.’ One of them replied : ‘ Indeed, do you think we can allow our honoured guest to clean his dishes ? ’ Forthwith he stuck out his tongue, which was certainly six inches long and which could easily reach the bottom of the cup, and began licking the inside of the cup ! I could not say anything then, but when my tea was poured into the cup, instead of drinking it I washed out the cup with it. They were greatly surprised at this and began to laugh. My companion remarked that it was customary in India not to use a dish without first washing it, to which they replied that this was quite useless, for if it was necessary to wash the dishes, then one should also wash out the inside of the stomach every day !

“ So we ate the gruel, drank the tea, had prayers and went to sleep. . . .

“ We continued our work in Western Tibet for some time longer and then returned. Our intention had been to stay and work at least another month in that region, but from September on for several months the roads leading to India over passes 18,000 feet high are closed on account of snow.”

*The National Missionary Intelligencer*, September 1921.



## CHAPTER 13

### IN SWITZERLAND

1922

AFTER his return to India from Tibet, the way opened for Sundar Singh to go to Switzerland. He received an invitation to visit Palestine on his way there.

But before he left the shores of India again, he was invited to see Mahatma Gandhi in his Ashram. He went to the Ashram and Gandhiji asked him to tell him under what circumstances he became a Christian. Gandhiji had always the idea that many people joined the Christian Church for economic and social reasons and not from deeply spiritual motives. He was so impressed by the story which Sundar Singh told of his conversion that he asked him to repeat it to the members of his Ashram in their early morning prayers on the following day.

On January 29, 1922, Sundar Singh sailed for Palestine in S.S. *Caledonia*. In Palestine he was the guest of Sir William Willcocks, who had built the great Assuan Dam in Egypt. He had read the book entitled *The Sadhu* and had become deeply interested in him. Sir William insisted upon personally conducting him round in Palestine in his private car as a thank-offering for blessings received through that book.

For a week Jerusalem was their headquarters and Sir William took Sundar Singh out to some place of interest each day. Thus they visited Bethany, Bethlehem and Hebron, Jericho, the Dead Sea and the Jordan. The Bishop in Jerusalem asked the Sadhu to preach in the Cathedral, but he replied that he had come to Jerusalem to learn and not to teach. However, as the bishop urged him, Sundar Singh did give an address in the Cathedral. Sir William then took him up through Shechem to Nazareth and to the Sea of Galilee, visiting Tiberias, Capernaum and other places.

His work in Switzerland proved far more tiring than in any other country because of the constant pressure of publicity under which he worked. Even when he arrived in Switzerland he was a tired man, and his secretary complained that his first address was

a failure. He kept on working at high tension for several weeks on the Continent. This may be regarded as the beginning of his breakdown in health, about which we shall hear later in some detail.

Pastor Secretan writes :

“ When Sundar Singh in the spring of 1920 made his first tour in England, the Swiss Board of Missions to India received from the Rev. William Paton, Secretary of the Student Christian Movement there, the organizer of his tour, the suggestion that they might invite him to Switzerland, to encourage the friends of missions. Sundar Singh went over to the Continent and made a brief stay in Paris at the Mission Headquarters, but could not get as far as Switzerland, for invitations from the United States carried him off. The news of his visit had spread abroad, and disappointment was felt at his departure ; Mrs. Parker’s book, brought back from India by Dr. de Benoit and translated into French by Ch. Rochedieu, had aroused a lively interest. The Sadhu then promised that, if he had occasion to visit the West again, he would remember the friends of missions in Switzerland.

“ On Monday, February 27, . . . the officials of the Mission to India, with several other friends, were awaiting at Lausanne the arrival of the express from Geneva. The day before, Sunday 26th, the Sadhu had disembarked at 6 a.m. at Marseilles on his arrival from Palestine. At Marseilles, Pastor Hug had arranged for him two services, one in the morning at the Swiss Church, the other in the evening at the French Reformed Church. The Sadhu had travelled all that night, and was welcomed at Lausanne.

“ At Lausanne there was a certain amount of anxiety. How would this evangelistic and missionary tour turn out, when all the addresses had to be translated ? It was said that the Sadhu was difficult to translate ; he himself had first to think in Hindustani and then speak in English. Might not this apostle from India have some ideas and thought-processes which would run counter to our accustomed ways of thought and so distract from his message ? He alighted from the carriage—tall, slender, with his turban on his head, rather slow in his movements, his eyes half-closed, like a man who enters an unknown territory, allowing himself to be led by an unseen Guide, so as to avoid any false step. Introductions were made ; a greeting of welcome and benediction ; a gracious smile ; no effusiveness ; nothing more than that. The Sadhu was placed in a motor-car and conducted to Chailly, where the house of Dr. de Benoit was at his disposal ; but he paid no attention to the town or the mountains, and did not say a word to his fellow-passengers ; his was the ‘ inner life ’. We were already reassured.

“ In the evening a committee met him with the plan of campaign for his tour of Switzerland in the month of March already drawn

up: the map was on the table. In a moment the Sadhu had grasped it ; he took no notes, but the dates and places were firmly fixed in his mind. He accepted our plan, which had been submitted to him in outline before his departure from India, but he made us cancel some of the meetings : 'Don't make me speak more than once a day, except on Sunday ; it is not the same thing as giving a lesson in school ; that would become a routine business, like putting letters in the post, and would carry on blessing ; now we desire that the meetings should bear fruit.' We prayed together. He prayed like us, with simplicity. We were completely reassured and happy."<sup>1</sup>

The day after his arrival (February 28) Sundar Singh left for Bienne accompanied by Pastor Secretan and the shorthand typist, Miss Goodwin. Pastor Secretan acted as an escort and sought to keep the curious and thronging crowds away from Sundar Singh as much as possible.

Miss Goodwin writes of their arrival at Bienne :

"He wore a long, dark grey coat, like a rain-coat, over his saffron coloured robe, with a turban of the same material on his head, and good strong sandals on his feet, but no socks. I noticed folks were invariably struck by his feet especially when it happened to be a rather cold day. 'Alas, this poor man must be feeling cold.' 'This poor man' did not say much, but smiled continually, because he did not understand French, and the dear Swiss were a little bit afraid of their English and also of the great Sundar Singh. His smile, however, soon put them at their ease."

At Bienne the Sadhu was taken round the children's hospital, and gave an address in the church. He and his party then went on to Tavannes, a watch-making centre with a population of 3,000, situated in the Bernese Jura. Miss Goodwin recorded at Tavannes that "the factories were to close at 3 p.m. so that the hands might have a chance of hearing the Sadhu. . . . It was most interesting to see the country people waiting outside for a glimpse of him. They had come from miles away, on foot or in carriages."

Pastor Secretan tells us that a special train had brought them in hundreds from Trammelan ; and that even the postal van was full.<sup>2</sup>

The Goodwin diary continues :

"I could not help thinking of the crowd mentioned in the Bible who pressed Christ, to hear Him preach. It was a curious sensation and experience to find myself following that Man from the East, in his saffron robe and turban, and it was a sight for any artist.

<sup>1</sup> *Par Christ et Pour Christ*, pp. v-vii.

<sup>2</sup> p. vii.

The little town with its factories down below, the school-house on the hill above, mountains and woods all round, people hurrying up the road and swarming over the fields and the Sadhu striding along in front of us all. We passed through the building and stood on a wide balcony on the first floor, a sea of upturned faces in front and on either side, and boys perched on every tree in the neighbourhood of the school. . . .

“The address lasted in all about one hour and then we returned to the parsonage for tea. When I got there I found the Sadhu seated on a sofa with Madame Houriet’s little fair-haired girl between his knees. It was a picture, the little fair head so near that black-bearded, beautiful face. ‘She is not afraid of me. I am very fond of children,’ said the Sadhu. . . . A group soon formed near the sofa and we each tried to talk to the Sadhu. I asked a few questions about the vision of Christ, as to what he had really seen. He told us that he saw the whole figure of Christ, His long hair, His robe, the wounds in His Hands and Feet but they were ‘glorious’ not bleeding. He was not standing on the floor, and His Face was wonderful, so loving.”

On March 3 the Sadhu, Pastor Lauterburg and Miss Goodwin arrived at Lausanne.

“That evening Christ Church, Lausanne, was literally packed not only with English and Americans but also with Swiss. The Sadhu’s text was St. John 8 : 31, 32, ‘Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’

“As there was no interpreter I found it difficult to note every word, for, though the beginning of every address was spoken at moderate pace, the dear Sadhu invariably increased his speed and his excitement, so that often the words seemed to tumble over each other, and I found it difficult to follow him.

“These are a few of the Sadhu’s sayings :

“‘What is truth? Not a doctrine or dogma, but Jesus Christ Himself.’

“‘Some friends asked me what I thought of Western civilization. I told them I did not see real civilization but animalism. People do not know Christ, do not live with Him. They have learnt how to dress, eat and be punctual. They are trained animals.’

“‘Those who have seen Christ have no difficulty in understanding miracles. The great miracle is to receive life, to know the Truth, to find heaven on earth.’

“‘We are so busy we have no time to pray.’

“The address lasted but thirty-five minutes, to the great regret of many. Afterwards a private reception was held at the

Club. Among the congregation was Mr. A. J. Appasamy, a young Indian from South India, who helped Canon Streeter to write his book, *The Sadhu*."

In the course of the next few days Sundar Singh spoke in Lausanne Cathedral and in various churches. To Miss Goodwin's account of his meeting in Lausanne it is worth-while adding a note by Pastor Secretan about Sundar Singh's contact with pastors and professors and their judgment of him.

"It must be recorded with what love he was received by all the pastors and professors, even by those who had been led to a different conception of Christianity; they might have been distressed by certain statements of the Sadhu in reference to learning, surprised by his insistence on certain points, such as the miracles and the Divinity of Jesus Christ, but all recognized in him a brother, a genuine disciple of Christ to whom God had granted particular graces and experiences, which cause us to reflect and which cannot be set aside without investigation. This impression was very strongly felt at Lausanne at a special conference of persons engaged in the work of the Church. It is our duty to enrich our religious life when new experiences are brought to us by Christians of a new environment.

"It was striking to see this Christian, still young, a convert from Sikhism, completely dazzled by the light of Christianity, in the midst of venerable, grey-haired doctors, and answering them with a directness, a loving kindness, a frankness which won their sympathy. It is regrettable that the lack of time, the difficulties of language, and the excessive enthusiasm of the public prevented the pastors and professors from having even more profound conversation with the Sadhu."<sup>1</sup>

On March 9 they went on to Geneva. Miss Goodwin continues: "Before leaving the station the Sadhu was presented with a beautiful gold watch, a Zenith, from the young people engaged or helping in Mission work. It has his initials S.S.S. and bore an inscription. We all admired it, but the Sadhu showed his pleasure very quietly and remarked: 'I shall not want it in India. It is useful here.' . . .

"At Geneva the meeting was held in the Salle de la Reformation, and although snow was falling it did not prevent the people of Geneva filling the hall to overflowing." . . .

When the Sadhu left Geneva forty-two young people thanked him in a letter which they all signed.

At Neuchatel an evening meeting had been arranged. "It was to have been held in the church, but so many people had come in

<sup>1</sup> *Par Christ et Pour Christ*, pp. xi, xii.

from the country that it was decided to hold it outdoors, in front of the College. The Sadhu prefers speaking in the open air. He does not care for buildings, and particularly dislikes Anglican churches, because there are 'too many pillars, they come in between me and my hearers.'

“ ‘ Would you object to speaking in a Catholic church ? ’

“ ‘ Not at all, but there are so many pictures, there would be no room for me.’

“ It was a difficult task to reach the stone platform in front of the College. There was a splendid crowd of upturned faces, nearly 5,000, and it was delightful to hear them sing. A small child, in front of me, spent most of her time making little grabs at the Sadhu's robe. The Saint was at his best that evening, and did not seem to mind being pressed by the crowd. The text was St. Matthew 4 : 17, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.' . . .

“ March 14th . . . Again we were a large party for lunch . . . The guests were mostly lads and a little shy of asking questions. I thought they might like to hear about the wonderful old hermit in the Himalayas, the Maharishi of Kailash, and passed the question to Mr. de Rougemont. He said he did not think the Sadhu would answer it. He said : 'Ask him yourself'; I did, and the answer I got was, 'It is very interesting but not useful.' I tried to coax him to tell the boys something, but it was of no use. The dear Sadhu was not going to satisfy mere curiosity, and he never did. Whenever he thought questions were only prompted by curiosity he gave no answer. He always made it quite clear that he had come to give his message about the Living Christ, not to answer idle questions.”

“ At Bale, the pastor said that he had been much bothered by people wanting tickets for Sundar Singh's meeting, and one angry lady had said : 'In Heaven there won't be any closed meetings.' The Sadhu quickly remarked, 'In Heaven there will be no small halls.' ”

The next centre was Zürich. Speaking in St. Peter's the Sadhu took for his text I Corinthians 1 : 23, “ We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.”

While still speaking he was interrupted. “ A note was sent up to say it was time for the next meeting. 'The time is very short. There are some people waiting.' It was then 5-00 and the congregation left the church ; the patient crowd outside then rushed in. The folks were so excited, the men even more so than the women. It took exactly half an hour to empty the church and refill it.

“At 5-30 the Sadhu spoke again. He was not at his best, because he had not had time for quiet prayer and preparation. The interpreter, Mr. Schwab, was also not good. He seemed tired and nervous.

“It was 6-35 when the Sadhu ceased speaking, so the second consignment of listeners fared very well. There were about 2,500 of them each time.”

On March 21, in the train for Schaffhausen, “a gentleman came into the carriage and gave the Sadhu a beautiful bunch of red and white carnations. He took them with a smile and saying ‘Thank you’ put them down on a seat beside him, and didn’t even smell them. I rescued the poor things and placed them on the rack; afterwards one of our party put them in water. Letters were continually being given him by Mr. Schwab. They were mostly in German and were consequently passed back to him to be translated. Sometimes he would answer those written in English and tell Mr. Schwab what to say in German, but often there was no answer, especially if the letter chanced to be long! Occasionally Sundar Singh would use the letter as a duster and try to clean the window which was steamed! If the writers could have but seen their epistles!”

We learn from Pastor Secretan that at Zürich Pastor Oscar Pfister, who had published a vigorous pamphlet against the Sadhu, declaring that his manner of life was a return to the asceticism of the Middle Ages, that he was a pietist and a thaumaturgist, withdrew these criticisms after hearing and seeing him. In a personal letter addressed to Pastor J. Schlatter, President of the Zürich Auxiliary Committee of the Kanarese Mission, he wrote: “The living piety and the popular eloquence of this noble personality have made a profound impression on me: he produced an even more profound impression than Schaerer’s book (about him) would have led me to suppose.”<sup>1</sup>

“At Berne, the Sadhu spoke on St. Matthew 4: 19, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’

“‘Christ chose these simple fishermen because He had a simple message for the world, not philosophy. The world had enough of teaching and philosophy, Christ only wanted to give the message of salvation. It is a great privilege to meet such people in this world, who have the real message, and believe in the living Christ, and not in one who is dead and gone. At the same time I meet those who have no message, for whom Christ is dead and gone. I will not waste much time in speaking about them, only about those who have been doing something for our Lord. I am sorry to see

<sup>1</sup> *Par Christ et Pour Christ*, p. xi.

another side. People are doing goodwork, but it should be done by men and women. They think only men can do great work, but women also can do and have been doing good work. In olden days Deborah and Esther did great work. The first message of good news was given by a woman. The disciples were hopeless, but a woman brought the most important and essential news. In some places I have seen the women's spirit depressed. We must encourage them and then their spirit will grow stronger. A carriage cannot be used when it has only one wheel, but it must have two. So men and women should work together. From a worldly point of view they are male and female, but from a spiritual point there is no difference, only one soul. . . ."

Pastor Secretan says, "When we asked the Sadhu at Berne how he was, he replied, 'I am very tired,' which is easily understood; for a tour of this nature, probably unique in the annals of evangelism and revival in Switzerland, is not undertaken without intense effort, rendered more tiring still by the Sadhu's methods of work. He wrote down nothing, but imposed upon himself an interior preparation continually renewed by prayer and meditation. He gave the public a new text every day, carefully developed into a new address. One finds there dominant ideas, favourite illustrations, by the address itself is neither learnt by heart nor repeated; it springs from the Sadhu's intimate life: it is drawn from his communion with God. That no doubt explains its effect upon the hearers, in spite of the absence of human eloquence."<sup>1</sup>

The Rev. E. Schwab, who interpreted for Sundar Singh in parts of Switzerland and Germany, has sent me a recollection of him:

"One heard him speak less and less about the Sadhu and more and more about Christ. I had an unforgettable experience in this connection. We went by train to a far-off place for a meeting, the pastor of that place travelling with us. This pastor told the Sadhu that at the meeting in the evening a lady would come and speak to him, a lady who could not find peace, though she had gone to see many a famous worker in God's Kingdom. The Sadhu remained for a while quiet and absorbed in thought. Then addressing the pastor he asked him not to introduce him to the lady. The pastor was surprised, almost offended, that he refused such a cure of souls, but he kept quiet. The Sadhu noticed with his fine intuition that his attitude was not approved. Therefore he explained: 'Dear Pastor, this lady has to learn something, which she would not learn if I received her. She ought to learn that Christ is so much nearer to her, and can mean much more to her, than any man.'"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Par Christ et Pour Christ*, p. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> In his letter to me dated May 3, 1950.



After Sundar Singh's visit to Switzerland Pastor Otto Lauterburg, who had interpreted some of his addresses, thus summed up his impressions of him :

" During the last few weeks the Indian apostle Sundar Singh travelled through Switzerland and proclaimed in town and village the secret of a joyous life. Everywhere people came in throngs to hear his living utterances. Great crowds had to turn back in front of the church doors. One afternoon at Lausanne he was forced to leave the church and speak in the open air.

" What was it that drew people towards him ? Was it only a sensation, the holy yellow robe of a Sadhu, a homeless poor preacher wandering about ? Was it only that they wanted to see that man of whose wanderings in India and in dark Tibet they had heard, of whose trials and preservation they had read such strange accounts ? How often it happens that we are disappointed when we come into closer contact with some powerful speakers. . . . But Sundar Singh is still more stirring in his simple loving way in personal contact than in his speech. If in the morning, after his two hours of prayer and meditation on a Bible passage, he enters the room for breakfast, one feels that something of his peace and benevolence is coming upon one and that one has been led into a good way for that day.

" But what now is the message of Sundar Singh ? One can sum it up in the one demand : ' More Prayer.' With the same word he answered the questions of some pastors on what they should do to make their work more fruitful. ' Be men of prayer, and everything else, inner peace, a knowledge of daily duties, sacrificing love and service to one's neighbour, will all come by itself.' ' Put aside every morning some time for quiet meditation on the Word of God and for prayer and your life will be wonderfully changed.' This promise is found in all the addresses of this man whose own life seems to us to be an uninterrupted prayer. What good would it have done us if we had heard from his lips clever addresses about Indian life or about a solution of political and social questions which we Westerners cannot find ? For such things his long journey would not have been worth-while. But it was worth-while to tell us with simple stirring words : ' Without daily intercourse with God there is no piety, no Christianity, no real life. ' " <sup>1</sup>

The ample material we have about Sundar Singh's work in Switzerland enables us to get an idea of the change which took place in the content of his message as the years went by. During his first visit to England he had not been so critical. He was now very critical of the people of Europe and of their ways, though he constantly added that there were many genuine Christians among

<sup>1</sup> *Emmentaler Bote*, March 1922.

whom he felt quite at home. It is difficult to say how far his ill health, which was now beginning, was responsible for the extremely harsh things which he said about Christianity in Europe. Or it may be due to the fact that as he came to know Europe more intimately he saw its faults more clearly. His main complaint was that the people of Europe, though nominally Christians, were not spending much time in fellowship with Christ in prayer.

During his second visit to Europe he spoke more constantly and more emphatically about prayer than during his first visit. This means that he clearly realized that lack of prayer was the most serious fault in European Christianity. He did not call for self-sacrifice and renunciation, though he himself was following the life of a Sadhu depending on God and His people every day for even the bare necessities of life. He did not summon the Christians of Europe to missionary work in closed lands like Tibet with all its adventures and risks, though he himself continually sought to preach the Gospel in such countries in spite of persecution and suffering. Nor did he in the same emphatic way urge the people to study the Word of God, though every day he himself fed upon it and drew from it spiritual nourishment and strength. But again and again he pointed out the vital need for prayer as communion with the living Christ. It was clear to him that this was the greatest need of Western Christianity and that it was here he could make his most valuable contribution.

Some people among his audiences in Switzerland had read *The Sadhu*, which Canon B. H. Streeter and I wrote, and were familiar with the background of mystical experience from which he spoke with such earnestness and vigour about prayer, though most of the people did not know it. He realized that everyone need not have these experiences.

In Geneva he was asked what he thought of Christians who did not have, and probably will never have, such mystical experiences. To this he replied, "It is not necessary that everybody should see Jesus Christ with these eyes. Christ reveals Himself to us according to our needs. Everyone has not the same kind of difficulty. The most important thing is that Christ wants to reveal Himself in our souls. He is not anxious to satisfy our eyes but He wants to satisfy our souls. That is why I repeat again and again that through prayer He will reveal Himself to our souls. . . ."

Prayer to most Christians means petition for worldly or spiritual blessings for themselves and for others in whom they are interested. Sundar Singh's unwavering belief was that prayer was far more than petition. In Switzerland in one place he told his friends clearly that as a result of long reflection he had come to the conclusion that others should not pray for sick people but that the sick people themselves should approach God direct, and that

it would be good for them to realize that God was leading them closer to Himself through their sickness.

It is worth-while for us to remember that the Sadhu's diagnosis of Western Christianity was a pitiful lack of prayer in the sense of communion with the Living Christ. Mystical prayer came to him easily and naturally. From his youth up he had experienced singular raptures and visions. For long hours he could become absorbed in prayer without any effort on his part. God had lavishly poured such gifts on him. To many Christians prayer even for worldly things in which they are vitally concerned is only possible when the needs become urgent. To most people prayer is a matter of duty faithfully undertaken in the hope of spiritual rewards to come. In Europe the desire for the active Christian life is strong and attractive. Sundar Singh's continued teaching about the value of prayer, particularly as fellowship with the living Christ, was given with the full knowledge of the temptations and weaknesses of Western Christianity and should therefore be allowed its full weight.

## CHAPTER 14

### GERMANY, SCANDINAVIA AND HOLLAND

1922

“It was the evening of April 5, 1922. The great market church in Halle was full to the last seat. On the platform under the pulpit stood Sadhu Sundar Singh, the distinguished Indian from a noble Sikh family, in a cassock-like yellow robe, and preached the Gospel in Indian English. The Swiss missionary, Mr. Schwab, interpreted the address, sentence by sentence, into German. The great congregation was held spell-bound. That very evening the Swiss had handed over the Sadhu to me with the promise never to leave him alone until I was able to hand him once again to the Danish brethren who would await us in Korsor, and also the promise never to allow him to be entangled in political conversations.”

Pastor J. Pohl wrote thus in *Evangelische Missionsmagazin* (September 1926) about Sundar Singh's work in Germany. He continued :

“When the Sadhu came to Europe and when his friends prepared for his visit to Germany, they did not meet with an unconditional approval of their efforts. They were told, rightly, that one could not know as yet how this relatively young man from the Orient with his bubbling enthusiasm would develop. . . . One had already learnt by previous bitter experience. A short time ago Rabindranath Tagore had toured triumphantly through Germany. Was Sundar Singh's tour likely to be celebrated in the same way? We were afraid of every spectacular success in the missionary enterprise.

“We were somewhat suspicious, because he had already been in Ceylon, Burma, China, Japan, England and America, and was everywhere praised for being Christ like. Was it arrogant self-conceit which made him come to us too? When I was asked to accompany the Sadhu and to interpret his addresses, I declined very firmly, though I have a great love for Indians and though I was very much interested in the development of this outstanding man,

his direct calling and the genuineness of his Christianity. I did not like to interpret things which I could not accept myself . . . Despite all these genuine scruples against the Sadhu I was able to identify myself with him that evening in Halle to such a degree that we separated as brethren on April 14 in Korsor and have kept up our friendship to the present day.

“I came to know him as a simple witness of the Cross. . . . I lived with him in the pure atmosphere of conversation with God; his dogmatic formulas—if one can speak at all of these in connection with the Sadhu—were certainly not the same as mine; but he was a Christian in quite a different way from us, who stand on the whole doctrinal development of our Church with its battles and victories and experiences. In him everything was genuine and, despite his visions and miraculous experiences, so agreeably sober. Christianity meant to him personal communion with the living Saviour of sinners, as, in the red-hot iron, fire and iron are unmixed and yet inseparable.

“However, I missed in him the Pauline conception of sin with its appalling depth, and the rock-foundation of justification by faith alone as the unique and entirely ‘beyond ourselves’ reason of our salvation. For him all his joy in the Lord and his peace of forgiveness lay in the vision of the Living Christ in the great hour of his strange conversion. Already as a non-Christian he was a mystic. Even though his mysticism was, after his conversion to Christianity, entirely Christocentric, one has to try to understand Sundar Singh out of the essential characteristics of the mystic, though he seemed—to my mind—not to be involved in any mysticism. Sometimes it seemed as if God’s revealed Word, as the unique source of all our knowledge of God, had to stand back behind his experiences and visions. . . .

“What home-sickness he had! He felt like a bird in a cage. The whole atmosphere was heavy, he thought. ‘Yes’, I replied, ‘we are living under quite different climatic conditions.’ ‘Alas,’ he said, ‘I did not refer to the physical atmosphere at home. In India one feels everywhere, even through idols and altars, pilgrims and penitents, temples and tanks that there is a desire for higher things, but here everything points to armed force, great power and material things. It is the power from below which makes me sad.’

“It is not easy to give a final judgment on Sundar Singh. He is not yet at the end of his development either. I saw him as a child-like, humble man who loved intensely the Lord Jesus, the Son of God and Mary, and who was trained in suffering for Him. As an Oriental and a mystic he emphasized more Christ *in us* than *for us*.”

In a letter to Professor Heiler, the same writer, Pastor J. Pohl, said: “I am a convinced Lutheran and have been blamed that I

felt coldly towards him, especially Swiss people have blamed me much.

“The Mission Publication Office in Stuttgart had asked me to write down for publication the addresses of the Sadhu which I translated into German, and I had taken down notes immediately after all the addresses, yet the thing was difficult because naturally the Sadhu repeated himself very often, having always different people in front of him. While I was thus toiling I got to know the Sadhu’s little book *At the Master’s Feet*. I found in it everything, no more no less, which the Sadhu had been preaching and written in his own words. Therefore I translated this book and the publisher printed it, not in the original form as Visions but as the Sadhu’s message, which change upset the Swiss friends. But otherwise the translation was a literal one.

“I myself have been in India for twenty-five years and know something of the rich imagination of Indians, but I have the sure conviction that the Sadhu would tell nothing, really nothing but what are facts, would tell nothing which he had not experienced and experienced in the very same way he was telling it. Certainly ten days are not sufficient to get to know a person, but from all that I wrote to you in the beginning you can see that they helped me much to understand the Sadhu’s innermost personality.

“In a big meeting it might be possible for a clever impostor to answer the questions put to him, always in such a striking way as the Sadhu did without previous preparations, but we often sat face to face with him in small circles, for example in Kiel when Mr. Schmidt almost cross-examined him to get behind his true conviction about the vicarious sacrifice of Christ and about the Bible (also his visions). If here was a case of deceit, should nobody have noticed it? Were we not twenty people there! Of course he did not express himself in our dogmatic ways; that would rather have been suspicious to us.

“I spoke with him very minutely about his attempt to imitate our Lord in fasting forty days and nights. He himself said one should not want to imitate the Lord in such things and he had almost perished by trying it. Yet he was not sorry for having tried, for he had had days of endless joy in undisturbed fellowship with the Lord, he said.

“It is possible that I would have seen many things differently from how the Sadhu saw them, yet I am fully convinced, not only that the Sadhu has been in Tibet but also that he has really experienced all the miraculous things of which he has spoken.”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Kausch, Director of Missions, has given this account of Sundar Singh’s visit to Berlin :

<sup>1</sup> F. Heiler, *Apostel Oder Betruer?* pp. 73, 74.

“ It was only natural that in Berlin, wherever the Sadhu went, he created a sensation which obviously made him uncomfortable. This being stared at by people he tried to avoid wherever possible. And he also tried to avoid visitors. He ate and drank whatever was put before him but in very modest quantities. He expressed the wish to be entirely alone for several hours a day. He laid great stress on punctuality. He gave the impression of being a normal and complete person. He gave no impression in any way of being sick or exceptional. It was also totally foreign to him to strive after any effect. As he constantly lived in and for his God, he counted men and their judgment unimportant, without wishing to disregard them in any way as brothers and sisters. He preferred to appear before mixed audiences ; he declined to speak only to women and girls. He was not accessible to autograph collectors . . . . When Karl Kotthaus, who was skilled in reading people’s faces, saw a picture of the Sadhu which was taken by us, he immediately remarked : ‘ This man is quite ready for martyrdom.’ The Sadhu did not like being photographed but on being requested, he did not decline. . . .

“ I close with a small incident that occurred in the vestry of the church at Garrison immediately after a meeting. A Minister from Berlin came with his two children and requested me that I might ask the Sadhu that he would bless both the children. When I spoke about this to the Sadhu, he answered : ‘ The hand that once tore the New Testament is not worthy to bless, but I will ask the Lord God that He may bless the children,’ and then he continued in the German language—we otherwise spoke only in English—‘ God bless you, dear children.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

The following account has been given of Sundar Singh’s meetings in Leipzig :

“ From March 29th till 31st Sadhu Sundar Singh was in Leipzig. He gave two addresses, one in the Hall of Christian Service to the people and another in the biggest lecture hall in the University. Both times the crowds were so great that the halls were packed and not a few had to return home. It may be that many people were attracted there by the foreign personality in the yellow robe, wearing sandals on bare feet in spite of the winter cold. However, we may hope that a lasting effect was not wanting.

“ The deepest impression was made no doubt by the first address for Christians on Prayer and Meditation. . . .

“ The second address, to a great audience, was a reply to the question : ‘ Hinduism or Christianity ? ’ Side by side sat Christians, Social Democratic leaders, and even an Indian student from

<sup>1</sup> F. Heiler, *Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*, p. 238.

Lahore who heard out of the mouth of a fellow-countryman his witness for Christ."<sup>1</sup>

After the Sadhu's address on Prayer in Leipzig, the editor of a Church paper denied the evangelical character of the Sadhu's teaching. He wrote: "We cannot fully rejoice in the Sadhu. Though the pen is almost unwilling to question a man who has experienced such things, who has taken Christianity so seriously, yet Scripture itself says 'Prove all things'.

"Even the beginning of his address in Leipzig became a question-mark. He spoke about prayer and introduced his address more or less like this: Most Christians do not know what it is to pray. They think that to pray means to beg. But this is the lowest step of prayer. True, real prayer is union with God.

"In this doctrine he clashes with Christ who in His teaching about prayer always makes begging an object. The disciple is not above the Master, but in this the Sadhu is above the Master!

"Another thing was noticed in his Leipzig address. Where was the Cross? Paul did not desire to know anything but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. With the Sadhu the Cross of redemption that takes away the guilt of men remained almost hidden, anyhow it played no role. One had the impression that a sinful conscience would find it difficult to open itself to the Sadhu, who seemed to have little understanding of sin. Paul, by the vision of Christ, saw himself placed under the judgment of God; he was thrown down, not only bodily, and could not eat for three days in his great anxiety of heart. The Sadhu receives peace very soon. Nothing is said of judgment and guilt. The way from a persecutor to a worshipper is remarkably smooth.

"What nobody could escape—the hour of the publican, the hour of Damascus, the outcry of Luther: 'My sin, my great sin'—the Sadhu has escaped; even later this hour did not come to him. . . .

"One could say much more about the difference between the Sadhu and the Scriptures. His numberless raptures and visions are strange against the experiences of the Apostles. We cannot agree with Archbishop Soderblom, who praises him as a new embodiment of true Biblical Christianity, as one who has accepted the Gospel entirely. . . . Yet this remains: the Sadhu's admirable surrender to Christ, his inner harmony, his peace, his 'heaven upon earth' his blamelessly pious life; in brief, much of which we must say that it is a good example. We stand before a problem: a Christianity without the way of the Cross. We decline in any way to judge the Sadhu's person. If anyone says that he has fellowship with God, or that he is a disciple of Jesus as few are, we do

<sup>1</sup> *Das Evangelische Lutherische Missionsblatt*, 1922, p. 109.



not dare contradict him. Only that he could become an apostle of India, that he proclaims fully the old gospel, that we doubt."<sup>1</sup>

For some years Dr. H. W. Schomerus worked in South India as a missionary of the Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission. He gained a considerable knowledge of the Tamil language and wrote a scholarly treatise in German on the Saiva Siddhanta, the most characteristic religious and philosophic system of South India. Later he joined the staff of the University of Kiel. I spent a week with him in Kiel. The account he gives of Sundar Singh's visit to Kiel is full, frank and interesting: it is found in a letter he wrote to Professor Heiler :

"When Appasamy visited me here in New Year 1922 and told me of the proposed journey of the Sadhu to Switzerland and Sweden, I decided to ask him to speak in some places in Germany and declared myself ready to make the necessary arrangements. I have to confess that I felt a little awkward about it. I knew him only through the book by Streeter and Appasamy. . . .

"At last he came to Kiel and was my guest here for three days. It was evening when he arrived. But the short discussion I had with him on the very evening of his arrival did away with all my fears. How genuinely and naturally he behaved ! Nothing of enforcing piety upon others ! He certainly wore the garment of a religious man and his piety was visible in his face but he did not make a show of it . . . . As I knew from certain English pious circles that they look upon not smoking or smoking as a proof of being converted or not, I offered to the Sadhu after the evening meal, when we were sitting cosily together for a little while, a cigar as a kind of test. He, of course, rejected it but he asked me to smoke by all means if I was a smoker and I did so. . . .

"On the second evening of his visit here he spoke in our main church, specially giving warning not to remain outside the door but to enter in. In affirmation of this he told some of his well-known miraculous experiences, not to boast about them but to give emphasis to his witness. Afterwards when we sat in my home talking together, I mentioned Luther and how little value he paid to all subjective experiences. I had the impression that I had spoken out what was in his own soul. Certainly his miraculous experiences mean much to him but they are not the foundation of his faith. He looks upon them as a special gift which God had granted to him because he needed it. Luther did not need that ; he therefore was the greater man, he said. What he had experienced was rather meant to make him small and humble and not proud and high.

<sup>1</sup> *Allgemeinen Evangelisch—Lutherischen Kirchenzeitung*, 1922, pp. 727ff.

“ For the following evening I had arranged a public address in the University Hall, not without some inner misgivings, for had I not to expect that some of the Professors would make fun of me if the Sadhu did not do this thing well, since I had arranged the lecture ? But now I can say that I was glad he spoke there. He chose the theme ‘ Why did I become a Christian ? ’ And amongst other things he gave a criticism of Hinduism and Buddhism.

“ On the third day the Sadhu gave answers to questions in a small circle. All who were present admired not only how quickly he caught the sense of the questions put to him and how well his answers fitted but also his open and straight character and his touching modesty that he did not want to be anything, so that Christ should be everything.

“ Privately I discussed this and that with him but cannot now remember. But I remember that I spoke with him about the task which he has to fulfil, according to my mind. I showed him that his task was in India and Tibet, not so much in Europe, and asked him not to let himself be disturbed by more tours to Europe or America. And he assured me that he would visit Europe no more. I told him so purposely, because I am convinced that he is called by God to bring Christianity to India. . . .

“ Thinking of all that I have spoken with the Sadhu, and of the impression he has made on me, I can never believe that he could be a deceiver. Maybe, he does not always rightly explain his experiences : who can ? But subjective he is and would never lie purposely.

“ I have one wish for the Sadhu. We should not speak too much of him, either on the side of his enemies or on the side of his friends. Let him be. We may so easily destroy what God has made by touching it with our hands. The inner religious life of a man is something very delicate and would lose its purity and freshness if it is handled too much.”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Nathan Soderblom, the Archbishop of Uppsala and one of the outstanding Christian leaders in Europe, read the book entitled *The Sadhu* and became greatly interested in Sundar Singh. He himself wrote a book in Swedish with the title *Tre Livsformer*, published in 1922, in which he devoted a chapter to Sundar Singh.<sup>2</sup> Archbishop Soderblom had made an extensive study of the religions of India and was able to show how Sundar Singh’s distinctive Christian experience and teaching arose out of the Indian soil. Here is the Archbishop’s estimate :

<sup>1</sup> F. Heiler, *Apostel Oder Betruer ?* pp. 65-68.

<sup>2</sup> This chapter was translated into English and published in an abbreviated form as an article in *The International Review of Missions*, 1922 pp. 226-238, under the title “ Christian Mysticism in an Indian Soul ”.

“What do we learn from this Christian mystic from the country of mysticism? A surprising lesson which puts to shame all ideas about a higher synthesis of the Bible and the sacred writings of India. The Gospel has not undergone any change but it has received in Sundar Singh's message a surprising interpretation from which we have to learn something not from India but from the Gospel itself, which the West has to a certain degree remade according to its own image. Sundar Singh is a genuine Indian. He is an equally genuine Christian. The greatest teacher in the West, St. Augustine, first embraced the Neo-Platonic mysticism in its pure form and then equally wholeheartedly the Pauline Gospel. Sundar Singh likewise proclaims in his life and teaching a Christian religion which in India is not changed but is purified and reveals its innermost nature, which has been obscured in the West.

“Sundar Singh is a typical Indian in devoting much time to meditation. Several hours he will spend sitting with his eyes open but deep sunk in another world, where he dwells with angels and saints and with the Saviour. Visions overflow in his life. He values ecstasy but he never seeks for it; there he is unlike Indian Yogis. Less important similarities with his Eastern background are found in his love of parables and in his way of thinking in pictures. Like Buddha and Christ, he proves by parables (not by arguments). . . .

“Prayer is everything in his life. As a man of prayer he cannot approve of any other idea of God than that which is expressed in the Indian tradition as *Bhakti*, namely, devotion to a personal God. This personal God is Christ. He is the object of his prayer and the centre of his visions.”

When Sundar Singh visited Sweden in 1922 he stayed as the guest of the Archbishop of Uppsala in his house for ten days during the month of April. The Archbishop had many conversations with him and then wrote a book in Swedish entitled *Sundar Singh's Budskap*. This was published in 1923. I have gathered together here some of the references to Sundar Singh in this book.

Sundar Singh gave an address in the Cathedral in Uppsala. When he was taken round the Cathedral before the service he was particularly interested in the beautiful stone coffin of Swedenborg, because he had also seen visions like Sundar. He regretted that he had not had the opportunity to study what Swedenborg wrote about his visits to the other and world, above all, about how Christ had revealed Himself to him. These two seers were akin to each other as they both that held the revelation of God apart from Christ was absurd and impossible. But while Swedenborg in the name of Christ denied the doctrine of the Trinity as taught by the Church, Sundar Singh knew the Father, the Son and the Spirit

as Three and yet as One. We shall see later how Sundar made a careful study of the writings of Swedenborg.

After the address in the Cathedral there was a gathering of Swedish friends in the Archbishop's house to receive him. A little girl garlanded him, following the Indian custom, and those who were at the reception greeted him with clasped hands, also as in India. Though there were many people, old and young, Sundar Singh became immediately absorbed in the children who were there and seemed almost to forget that many grown-up people were also there, desirous of speaking to him.

In his address in the University Hall of Uppsala he explained very clearly his experience of Vedanta and Yoga. The address reminded the Archbishop of Buddha's struggle to reach enlightenment through the study of Brahman wisdom, through self-discipline and through Yoga. To Swedish scholars these practices were abstract and remote. It was, therefore, a great surprise to them to listen to a man to whom they had meant life and death and who spoke so earnestly about them. He showed clearly why he could not remain in the old ways of salvation as set out in India and yet what a painful thing it was to him to leave the religion of his dear mother and the worship which his forefathers had followed. To those who went to hear an interesting exposition of Hinduism, Sundar Singh's address was a disappointment. But to those who sought to understand how deeply a Christian Sadhu stood in relation to the religious life of his own land, the address was enlightening.

The Archbishop says that Sundar Singh's stay with him gave him an opportunity to complete and correct the picture of him which *The Sadhu* book gave. In this book the authors have systematized Sundar Singh's teaching too much. The elements of his message as they have set them out are correct but not the implications which they have drawn. Sundar Singh himself would not have drawn those implications. He threw up spontaneously many ideas, the consequences of which he did not realize. Nor did he seek to construct any system out of those ideas. In this way the personal contact with Sundar Singh enabled the Archbishop to gain a clearer picture of him.

It is significant that Archbishop Soderblom believed fully that Sundar Singh had really seen Christ in his visions; Christ spoke continually to His disciple, Sundar Singh, and revealed His will to him.

Bishop A. Nygren of Lund expressed (in 1950) a sense of disappointment in one of the Sadhu's addresses in Sweden:

"Sadhu Sundar Singh, in the twenties, toured through Sweden. With great expectation I went to his lecture. The Gospel is so rich

that it does not at once reveal its full content to a generation or to a nation. Thus the history of the Christian religion has testified to the fact that each new people, that has been drawn into its sphere, has been able to give a special contribution to a deeper understanding of some aspect of the Gospel. Would this also be the case with the Indian people? Would perhaps this lecture of the Sadhu give a glimpse of what India is able to contribute to the interpretation of the Gospel? From this point of view the lecture of the Sadhu was rather a disappointment. It contained too much of a commonplace Anglo-American type of Christian preaching, supplemented by some miracle stories, and too little of genuine Indian thinking."

From Sweden Sundar Singh travelled to Norway and Denmark. The Rev. P. Lange, a Danish missionary in India, wrote to me in May 1950 :

" . . . At Copenhagen (27th May) the Sadhu spoke in a big concert hall and made a deep impression. The Dowager Empress of Russia, whose son Alexander III and family were killed cruelly in Russia in 1917, asked the Sadhu to come to her castle. He asked why he should specially go to her and was told that no woman had suffered like her. So he went and she asked him to bless her. As his wont was, he answered that his hand which had once torn up the Bible could not bless her ; only the pierced hand of Christ could."

In Holland a Dutch translation of Mrs. Parker's book about Sundar Singh had appeared in 1920. In the following year the people in Holland began to read *The Sadhu*. These publications made Sundar Singh's name familiar to a wide circle of readers, and at the invitation of Baron von Boetzelaer, Sundar Singh agreed to visit Holland.

Speaking in Rotterdam, June 12, 1922, the Sadhu became severe and warned Holland. India asks more and more for the Gospel. Europe is in danger of becoming more and more in different. And yet Europe owes all the blessings of culture, freedom and education to Christianity. Europe is like Judas Iscariot who ate with Christ and then denied Him. But now Europe has also to fear the fate of Judas (it may hang itself on the tree of learning). The Sadhu said finally : " You have so many privileges. We, in the East, have to give up many things when we become Christians. You do not have to. Be therefore careful that you don't lose your only possibility for external happiness."

The Sadhu's friends in Holland were impressed by the fact that during his tour in that country he always chose different texts for his sermons and used different illustrations, though the main points of his addresses remained the same. Every day his address was the fruit of hours of meditation and prayer and was marked by its freshness.

In a Confirmation Service Sundar Singh said : " Don't throw bare bones (dogmas) before these young folk but break the bones in order to give them the marrow. "

Asked whether more missionaries were needed in India, he replied : " Yes, but your philosophy we don't need. It is better to send one who is a disciple of Christ than a hundred who are not. "

Dr. van Boetzelaer summarized thus the significance of the Sadhu's visit to Holland :

" What did the Sadhu bring us during his visit? . . . We realized that in Christ the East and the West could meet and that there was no unbridgeable gap between the two. We also learnt that we did not need to despair that it is impossible for our missionaries to pass on the Gospel to the East in a suitable form . . . When we got to know the Sadhu, he seemed to be far less of a heretic than we anticipated after reading the book by Streeter and Appasamy. He assured us that he gave weight to his visions and spiritual experiences only in as far as they coincided with the Bible and that he rejected everything which was not in harmony with the Bible."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Baron van Boetzelaer, *Keur Uit De Toespraken van den Sadhoe Soendar Singh*, pp. 3-7.

## CHAPTER 15

### LIFE AT SUBATHU

1922-1925

SUNDAR SINGH returned to India tired in mind and body after his second tour in Europe. His days had been packed with engagements and there had been no long stretches of leisure for the prayer and meditation for which his soul craved. His immediate task, therefore, was rest at Subathu and for several weeks he did not go out on any preaching tour. The peace and beauty of the Himalayas, which he loved so dearly, soon restored him to his normal health.

Among his papers at Subathu the following bill for books has been found :

No. 8417  
103, Meadows Street,  
Fort, Bombay, 9th Sept. 1922,  
Post Box No. 187.

Sundar Singh Esqr.,  
Subathu,  
Simla Hills.

D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co.  
beg to advise despatch of the following goods per V.P. Post and trust same will reach you safely.

	Rs.	As.
1 Anthropology by E. B. Tylor Rs. 8/8 at 7/7	..	7 7
1 Lecture on Sex and Heredity by Bower Rs. 5 at 4/6	..	4 6
1 Brahmadasanam by Acharya Rs. 4/8 at 3/15	..	3 15
1 The Idea of God as Affected by John Fiske Rs. 6/- at 5/4	..	5 4
1 Outlines of the History of Ethics by Sidgwick Rs. 4/- at 3/8	..	3 8

1 The History of Philosophy by Windelband	Rs. 24/-	Rs.	As.
at 21/-		..	21 0
1 Humanism by Schiller	Rs. 10/- at 8/12	..	8 12
1 Text Book of Psychology by William James		..	
Rs. 10/- at 8/12		..	8 12
1 Religion and Philosophy by Collingwood	Rs. 5/-		
at 4/6		..	4 6
1 Wonders of Physical Science	Rs. 2/- at Rs. 1/12	..	1 12
Postage and Regtn.		..	3 4
			-----
		Rs.	72 6

This is certainly a curious development. As a boy Sundar Singh was so eager to preach that he did not even complete his high school education. During the school holidays in September 1905 he was baptized; and a month after this he became a Sadhu and never returned to the school. When he was sent to St. John's Divinity School at Lahore for a theological course he left it without completing his course. He was fully convinced that in order to be an effective preacher of the Gospel it was not necessary for him to study either in a high school or in a theological college. The only adequate preparation for such work was the study of the Bible and of the Book of Nature under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, who is the Author of both. In his addresses he continually pointed out that human learning was of no avail for our knowledge of God.

And now it looks as if he was settling down to a course of reading. With his usual practice of spending the minimum amount of money on his personal needs, he ordered a number of books at reduced prices. It is interesting to note that philosophy and natural science attracted him most. We shall find that these subjects continued to interest him and that he devoted a certain amount of his time to their study.

Though Sundar Singh had returned from Europe completely fatigued, some weeks of rest set him up and he was able to visit and preach during the last months of the year (1922) in many large cities of North India such as Delhi, Ludhiana, Allahabad, Benares and Lahore. In Ludhiana he visited his old school and spent a day with the missionary who was working there. This missionary enquired from Sundar Singh carefully about his experiences during his European tour. He reported that Sundar Singh was much impressed with an interview he had with the French philosopher and mystic, Henri Bergson. Bergson asked Sundar Singh many questions about his experience and thought of Christ. "Finally," said the Sadhu, "I turned to him and said, 'And what do you think of Him?'" The philosopher was plunged



in thought for a moment and then said : " I admit that He was not a man. My philosophy has no place for Him." Sundar Singh's philosophy has little place for anything else.<sup>1</sup>

In April 1923 his aged father, Sher Singh, passed away. The son felt sure that the separation between him and his father was only bodily and for a short time and that he would soon see his father again in glory.

When Sher Singh died he insisted on leaving for his son, Sundar, half his property, which consisted of lands and money in the bank. It was his father's wish that Sundar Singh should buy a house for himself so that there could be a place where he could retire for rest and prayer between his tours. When Sher Singh told Sundar that he would like to leave him some money also so that he could have something to fall back on in old age, Sundar had said that he would not live to old age and that he would need no money. But Sher Singh had paid no heed to this objection and had made the necessary provision in his will. The lands Sundar Singh handed over to his brother, but he accepted the money.

During the second week in May 1923, Sundar Singh wrote letters informing his friends that he was leaving for Tibet, and for some time nothing was heard from him. A Bombay paper published a rumour to the effect that he was no longer alive. This news was copied by various papers in India and Europe. In England *The Daily News* said that it was informed on good authority that Sadhu Sundar Singh, the Indian Christian saint and mystic, had been murdered in Tibet by Buddhist fanatics.

The rumour of his death caused very great anxiety among his friends. Many Christian schools in Assam were closed as a sign of mourning. After some time Sundar Singh, who had heard of this rumour, wrote expressing his deep regret at the lying report. On July 14, 1923, he said in a letter to the Rev. H. A. Popley : " Owing to some difficulties I could not go very far into Tibet and I have just returned and now my friends do not let me go again to Tibet. I think some enemy is responsible for the false report of murder."

Sundar Singh's account of this trip to Tibet has been the subject of much criticism by his enemies. They point out that on June 27 he wrote to Mr. Walter Sloan at the Keswick Convention that he was about to journey into Tibet and on July 5 he wrote from Subathu to Mr. Coldstream of Kensington that he had just returned from Tibet. From these facts his enemies have come to the conclusion that he never went into Tibet but that he deliberately misled his friends. In nine days he could not really have gone into Tibet and returned. The above extract from the letter to the

<sup>1</sup> *The Indian Witness*, January 9, 1930.

Rev. H. A. Popley is published for the first time in this book. It was written soon after the event without any idea of publication and without any reference to the controversy which took place in later years about the journey. Some of the letters which Sundar Singh wrote at the time were ambiguous and gave rise to the controversy. This letter to Mr. Popley, however, is quite clear and gives a reasonable explanation of the circumstances under which Sundar Singh had to return home so quickly.

In September 1923 he wrote a devotional book which was afterwards published under the title of *Reality and Religion*. He prepared the manuscript in Urdu, working about twelve hours a day at it for twelve days, and was looking for someone to translate it from Urdu into English. As I had collaborated in writing *The Sadhu*, he invited me to go to Subathu to spend a few days with him to help him translate the new book. At that time I was teaching in Bishop's College, Calcutta. I travelled up to Subathu, a journey of 1,258 miles.

In response to his father's wish that he should buy a house for himself, Sundar Singh had bought one at Subathu. There were many reasons which led to his choice of Subathu as his home. It was there that he had begun his life as a Sadhu in 1905, so the place had some sacred memories for him. He loved the Himalayas and could see daily those glorious mountains from Subathu. He was proud of being a Sikh. He once told me that the Sikhs would be the first to die for religion or revolution. In Subathu he was in the land of the Sikhs and continually came in contact with them.

Instead of buying a bungalow for himself, as his father had suggested, Sundar Singh had bought a small old mission house for Rs. 500. I had to walk through the dirtiest and busiest part of the town to reach his house. His next-door neighbours belonged to the scavenger caste who often, in the quiet of the night, indulged in weird music or noisy quarrels. His house was on the edge of the town. From it I saw a magnificent view of the mountains. The house seemed to me a significant symbol of the two worlds with which Sundar Singh constantly tried to live in contact—the busy world of men, sometimes dirty and sordid, and the world of Nature so beautiful and calm.

The major part of the house was occupied by a friend of his, Dr. J. W. Peoples, a medical man working in the Leper Asylum at Subathu. Sundar Singh reserved for himself a room where he kept the photographs of his friends whom he had met in his travels and also a few books. Among these I noticed two large volumes of *An Outline of Science*, which had been recently published under the editorship of Professor J. A. Thompson. Sundar Singh had read through these two volumes carefully, making many marks. He had always been a great lover of Nature and

many of his illustrations had been taken from it. All these years he had contemplated Nature with his keen observation and shrewd common sense, but he had not made any scientific study of Nature. It was clear that he was now seeking to understand Nature with the help of modern science.

Dr. Peoples was a married man and had four children. I was interested in seeing the Sadhu talking to these children. It is often said that Sundar Singh ought to have founded a monastery and trained up other Sadhus, who would carry on Christian work as he did. My own impression was that he would have been very unhappy in such an environment. Though a celibate himself, he loved children and felt really happy in a home.

When we worked together Sundar Singh kept the manuscript in his hands and gave me in English the substance of what he had written, for I did not know Urdu. Sometimes I took word for word what he said and sometimes I put down the substance of his paragraphs, using wherever possible his own language. By this time he had acquired a considerable facility in the use of the English language. He had a real feeling for words and also a flair for puns and epigrams. But as he had not gone to college his knowledge of English grammar and idiom was rather poor and I was often able to help him to put down his thoughts accurately without making slips in grammar or idiom. I remember how keen he was to get the correct word or phrase to convey his meaning.

I was also impressed during those days by the eagerness with which he sought to pass on to others the rich experiences of his Christian life. Living with him closely, I realized how deep his evangelistic passion was. The desire to share with others the profound experiences of his Christian life was compelling and he was prepared to take much trouble to make them clear to others.

Sundar Singh had always taken considerable interest in the work of the National Missionary Society of India, which had its headquarters in Madras. This Society had appealed to him greatly as the first large missionary society which had been organized by the Indian Church to proclaim the Gospel in those parts of India and the neighbouring countries where there were no Christians. Sundar Singh had for several years made Tibet his special field of labour during certain months of the year. He had shown in his own adventurous life the possibilities before the Indian Church for preaching Christ to the people of Tibet. He believed that such work was supremely worth doing by the Indian Church. He used every opportunity he could to impress upon the N.M.S. his conviction that the work of evangelizing Tibet and the States in the Himalayas was work which that Society should no longer neglect.

In 1922 Sundar Singh had made a definite proposal to the N.M.S. for starting missionary work on the border of Tibet. In

January 1924 he renewed his proposal. He was personally committed to having no connection with any Society or organized Church and therefore declined to have any official relationship with the N.M.S. The Society agreed with him that it was not necessary for him to have any official relationship with it. But as a friend deeply interested in the work of the Society he undertook to select two suitable workers, to begin with, and to take them with him on his preaching tours in Tibet and the Himalayan States. He proposed that these workers might make Subathu their headquarters when they were not on tour and that from that centre they could work among the people living in the hills. It was hoped that suitable men would be available by April 1924, when the Sadhu expected to leave for Tibet.

The Subathu papers contain the first letter which Professor Friedrich Heiler wrote to Sundar Singh on February 3, 1924. I had met Professor Heiler several times during the months I spent in Marburg-on-the-Lahn in Germany in the year 1922. He had already come into great prominence as a theologian. While still young (about thirty years of age) he had written a book on Prayer which had aroused considerable attention in the theological world. He had brought together the teaching about Prayer in the different religions of the world and had shown in the book signs not only of his vast learning but also of his deeply religious nature. When the book entitled *The Sadhu* was published, a copy of it was sent to Professor Heiler by the editor of the German paper, *Christliche Welt*, for review. Professor Heiler became so interested in the book and in Sundar Singh that he himself wrote another book entitled *Sadhu Sundar Singh: Ein Apostel des Ostens und Westens*. This was first published in German in 1924.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Heiler explained in his Introduction that the books already published about Sundar Singh had tended to emphasize either the miraculous element in the life of Sundar Singh (as in Mrs. Parker's biography) or the ecstatic element (as in *The Sadhu*). He felt that the message of Sundar Singh did not receive the emphasis it deserved in the books about him. And so he dealt carefully with the essential elements in the teaching of Sundar Singh and pointed out its significance for India on the one hand and for the Western Christian world on the other. With his extensive knowledge of the different religions of India he brought out clearly the background of religious thought and experience which lay behind Sundar Singh's message. This learned German professor had never lived in India and sometimes it looked as if

<sup>1</sup> In 1926 a fourth German edition was published. 15,000 copies of the German book were sold. An English translation of the book appeared in 1927 under the title of *The Gospel of Sadhu Sundar Singh*. The English translation did not have as wide a circulation as the German original.

his interpretation was only bookish and not based on the realities of the religious life of India.

Professor Heiler's book is, however, significant as it considers Sundar Singh in the golden succession of the great saints of the Christian Church. Continually Sundar Singh's teaching is compared and contrasted with the teaching of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Catherine of Genoa, Jacob Boehme, Luther and other great figures in the Christian Church. It is significant that this distinguished Professor in a German University sought thus to consider Sundar Singh's place among the spiritual giants of Christendom.

Though Professor Heiler had already been writing about Sundar Singh, he came into personal contact with him only from 1924. In his first letter to Sundar he writes :

“ . . . Your message has given me clearness on many theological problems. Though I always was an enemy of the modern theological rationalism, I valued the radical criticism of the Bible and the history of religions. But now I have got a fuller and clearer conception of the divinity of Jesus Christ. And for this it is especially you whom I have to thank. Since coming to know your life and your preaching, I read the New Testament with new eyes.

“ But the problem of the true and pure Church, which has troubled me since my youth, you do not clear up. Indeed I think I am able to understand especially your position beyond all particular Christian churches, because I have not been satisfied either by Catholicism or by Protestantism. But, on the other hand I see the great saints of Christianity from the Apostolic Fathers to the mystics of the Middle Ages in the communion of the Church. St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Cyprian, St. Augustine, St. Chrysostom, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Teresa of Jesus—they all were devoted in fervent love and truth to their Church ; they all could say : ‘ Christian is my name, Catholic my surname.’ They all subordinated themselves to the authority and tradition of the Church ; they all lived continually in liturgical and sacramental communion with the Church. In this synthesis between a living personal communion with Jesus Christ and a complete subordination to the great communion of the Church lay their strength.

“ I shall be very glad if I could receive a brief answer from you to the whole complex, not to all the single questions. Please don't misunderstand me. I don't wish to criticize your position or to instruct you, but I only wish to get enlightenment on my personal problems and difficulties from a holy man, who possesses the charisma of ecstasy.

“ Now I am preparing an anthology of your sermons for German readers I shall be very happy if I could be allowed to translate your book on ‘ Visions and Meditations ’ into German. I am going to learn Urdu now in order to be able to read your books in your own language, and as I have already learnt Sanskrit and Arabic, this will not be very difficult for me.

“ I am very glad that I could write a book on you, for I am convinced that many learned people in Germany, who have a rationalistic view of the world, will get a deeper apprehension of Christianity by your personality and your message.

“ I thank you once more heartily for all that you have done for me. May God protect you and your journey to Tibet and bless your preaching of the Gospel.”

In February 1924 Sundar Singh addressed some meetings among the Santals, an aboriginal tribe of north-eastern India. The meetings were held at Grahampur in the Goalpara district in Assam. Sundar Singh spent five days there. His visit was an event of rare joy to the Santals. In March he visited the Khasia Hills on the occasion of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of India, which was held at Mairang.

“ Another invitation to visit America came to the Sadhu, to which he replied that he did not wish to go abroad again. He gave two reasons : first of all, that India was his own country and that he wished to spend the rest of his days working in India ; secondly, that there was great work still to be done in India. The reply from America was : ‘ You can’t make the excuse that India is your own country. Are you forgetting that now you belong to the whole world ? ’ . . .

“ In a year some five to six hundred invitations to different countries and places all over the world reached the Sadhu ; and sometimes forty to fifty of these happen to be for the same day. So he occasionally teasingly tells his friends to boil him down and make soup of him and let everybody have an opportunity of having a spoonfull ! ”<sup>1</sup>

Sundar Singh’s health was beginning to fail. On June 13, 1924, he wrote a letter to the Rev. H. A. Popley : “ I returned from my tour last week. I have had very good opportunities of preaching the Gospel but I am sorry to say that owing to the weakness of my lungs I could not cross over high mountains on my way to Tibet and so I had to return. Hard work and continuous speaking for years in large meetings have affected my lungs, but I am feeling better now. ”

<sup>1</sup> From *Sermons and Sayings of Sadhu Sundar Singh during his visit to the Khasia Hills, Assam*, compiled by J. Helen Rowlands and Hridesh Ranjan Ghose.

In September 1924 he completed his new book on *The Search after Reality*. Its sub-title—"Thoughts on Hinduism, Buddhism, Muhammadanism and Christianity"—gives an indication of its contents. Besides studying the sacred books of these religions and the writings of their leading thinkers, he had had personal contacts with many of their learned followers. Particularly in his earlier years he had done much bazaar preaching and had learnt at first hand the problems and difficulties of the various religions of India. In later years when he was called upon to give lectures in the Universities of Europe he spoke on the religions of India. This book contains his mature reflections on their fundamental beliefs and ideals.

In his German book, *Rund um die Welt* (pp. 21-30), Hans Anstein, a Swiss pastor, thus records the impressions of his visit in October 1924 to Sundar Singh and his native village :

"I made earnest enquiries about the Sadhu but I almost gave them up because I always got the same answer to my questions, that is, he lives somewhere in the lower ranges of the Himalayas but generally he is on tour in the plains. My mental comment to this statement was, how to find him under such circumstances? Unexpectedly I found myself on the right track, when a missionary of the American Presbyterian Mission told me in Ludhiana in the Punjab : 'This is the school which Sadhu Sundar Singh attended as a boy. His native village, Rampur, is not far off and from there it is only twelve hours' journey to his present residence at Subathu near Simla. . . .' I decided at once to go to Rampur. . .

"There was a stir in the village when we arrived there before 7 a.m. and enquired after the Sadhu's home. It was easy to get the information as everyone knows the name of the Sadhu. . . . The headman of the village came and gradually more people joined us, especially neighbours and cousins of the Sadhu, brothers as they called themselves ; two of them looked very much like him.

"All these people had this question in their minds: Why do you come here? Why does our Sundar evoke such an interest in you? When Jesus returned to Nazareth, his former school and play-mates may have behaved like this. I do not compare the Sadhu with Jesus. But the abysmal difference between the Sadhu's mentality and that of the Sadhu's family folk reminds me of Jesus' relatives, whose minds were closed to the world in which Jesus moved. On the one side the Sadhu, the Master Christian, whom thousands of people came to hear in a church in Zürich and with whom the leading minds of the Zürich church held converse on the things of the Kingdom of God, whose name will go down in the history of the Church Universal and about whom even today a large number of books have been written—and there, at Rampur, his nearest relatives whose vision is confined to their

village and who are perfectly unable to appreciate what their Sundar has gone through. . . .

“ From Rampur I reached Subathu after a night’s journey. I knew the Sadhu from his visit to Switzerland but I had then no opportunity to make his personal acquaintance. The verger of the Methodist church at Subathu took me to the Sadhu’s house and at once knocked at the door in spite of my protest, for it was six in the morning (on October 18, 1924). Immediately the Sadhu opened the door, clad in a homely cotton garment, and welcomed me, a complete stranger, like a friend. It was so natural and so cordial that apologies on my side were unnecessary. I at once felt at home with him as if I had been staying with him for a long time.

“ The Sadhu’s quarters were of a very simple type, an extension to a larger building, with mud walls. . . . It is situated on the top of a ridge, steeply sloping on both sides into the valleys beneath. Beyond these valleys there are higher ranges of wooded hills. In the west on a sunlit clearing lies the famous town of Simla. Looking straight on, the eye plunges into a very wide valley. On the right, a succession of ridges is crowned in the far distance with the Kashmir glaciers, resplendent, as it were, with heavenly light.

“ Looking at all these wonders of God’s creation one felt as if one should not speak at all. Human words would have sounded like profanation, but not the words in which the Sadhu once again told me of his vision of Christ. . . . He spoke of it in a very natural and simple way without superlatives and without improving upon the truth. Just as simply as a man would tell you how he met a friend, he explained how he had resolved to throw himself down across the rails at Rampur railway station, in case his quest for truth should not be answered ; how suddenly the light appeared to him coming through the door, from outside ; how in alarm he opened the door of his room to see whether the house had been set fire to ; how he saw the resplendent light but not the source of it ; and how the room he had just left was full of light and in it a most wonderfully kind figure appeared. ‘ I did not know who it was : whether Buddha, Muhammad, Krishna or Jesus. But when I heard him say to me, “ I am Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world : I died for thee. Why dost thou persecute me ? Be my disciple and proclaim my name ”, I went down, down, down to the Master’s feet and a wonderful peace came into my heart which has not left me. I then knew that we have a living Lord.’

“ He said all this in a most natural and sober way. His facial expression did not change. But there was on it a light of unspeakable happiness. There is one thing only with which I can compare it—the happiness of the little child standing near the lighted Christmas tree. The joy of Christmas in its deepest sense is the way of life of the Sadhu and this joy spreads among all those who



see and hear him. He does not live in a world created by his thought and meditation, as an Indian mystic does. He lives in the things eternally true, which to him are near and real. Who would not feel at home near him? A young Communist said after hearing him in Zürich that if all men were like this Sadhu, we surely would not need Communism."

Sundar Singh was the principal speaker at the Annual Mankughat Christian Convention in December 1924. Mankughat is fifty miles from Raipur in Central India. There were gathered together Christians of the American Evangelical Mission, the Disciples of Christ, the Mennonites and members of the Pentecostal Church. About 1,500 to 2,000 Christians assembled for the meetings, which were held in a temporary booth of bamboo mats on a little island in a river.

Dr. H. A. Feirabend has sent me this personal recollection of him on that occasion: "We had him to tea in our tent and then I asked him about the remark in Streeter's book, *The Sadhu*, which claims, if I remember right, that Sundar Singh had said that eventually even the devil would be saved, or something to that effect. Sundar Singh replied: 'If I believe that, then why should I go and suffer for the Gospel?' He said that he saw only one chapter in the book before it was published and protested against the contents but without effect. In fact, he was told that this was what the people wanted. He said that the truth would defend itself. After that, I lost much respect for Canon Streeter and could no longer recommend his book. To put it mildly, he must have misunderstood the Sadhu. Sundar Singh told me that the only authentic biography of him was that by Mrs. Parker."

There were two sets of critics who viewed with alarm the growing fame and usefulness of Sundar Singh. The Roman Catholics had the firm belief that their own Church was the mother of saints and were troubled when they saw a man of Sundar Singh's spiritual stature appearing in the Protestant Church. Father Hosten, S.J., of Darjeeling, began writing a series of articles against him in *The Catholic Herald of India* from the year 1923. He claimed that he was a historian and that it was his task to sift carefully all the evidence available, before he could accept the authenticity of any event. Father A. Vath, S.J., took up this controversy in Germany. Sundar Singh kept no written records of his life. He continually described from memory various incidents in his life on hundreds of platforms and in his articles and books. His critics collated the different versions carefully and found many discrepancies among them. They also sought the evidence of eye-witnesses, which in many cases was not forthcoming; some of the incidents described by Sundar Singh happened in remote places and it was not possible to get first-hand information, particularly

long years after the events took place. Father Hosten, therefore, came to the conclusion that Sundar Singh was an impostor.

The other set of critics were the Protestant Liberals who did not believe in the miraculous element in religion. They were disturbed when this popular evangelist, who wielded an immense influence, laid claim to various miracles in his own life. They also began investigating critically the many supernatural incidents which Sundar Singh described. The most distinguished of these critics was Dr. O. Pfister, who wrote a book in German entitled *Die Legende Sundar Singhs* in which he held that Sundar Singh had not been able to distinguish between the objective and the subjective. He said that Sundar Singh often mistook for objective reality his own desires and that a great deal of the experience which he described was nothing but wishful thinking.

Professor Heiler now entered the controversy and took up his defence. In 1925 he published in German a book entitled *Apostel Oder Betruger?* This book contained twelve letters written by the Sadhu, offering his own explanation of the many difficulties which his enemies had raised. It recorded the impression which he made upon his friends, both in India and in Europe. Long extracts were quoted in it from the books and articles which had appeared on the continent of Europe about him. They were theological judgments about the life and teaching of Sundar Singh and were not particularly concerned with the controversy about his truthfulness. A section of the book was devoted to an examination of the charges brought against him by his enemies.

Professor Heiler also sent out a long questionnaire about the incidents in the life of Sundar Singh and asked for every piece of information available about him. This questionnaire was circulated very widely and many letters reached the Professor in response to his enquiries. In 1927 he published these letters and the conclusions to which he came after studying them, in another book entitled *Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*.

I may also add that the Rev. Paul Gabler in 1937 (eight years after the death of Sundar Singh) wrote as a University thesis a book in German entitled *Sadhu Sundar Singh* examining afresh all the evidence available in connection with this controversy. Mr. Gabler had worked as a Lutheran missionary in India. He maintained that Sundar Singh's ministry had been abundantly blessed by God, though being a frail human being he had told many lies.

The main charges of the critics against Sundar Singh were these. He never fasted and in any case he did not fast for forty days. He never went to Tibet to preach there. The supernatural events which he described as having taken place in Tibet, such as his miraculous deliverance from a dry well, cannot be believed as

we have no eye-witnesses and Sundar Singh's own statements are full of contradictions. His account of the Maharishi of Kailash should also be dismissed as unhistorical for the same reasons.

It is not possible in this book to go over the whole controversy again and to examine in detail how far the accounts given by Sundar Singh were reliable. But I should like to give, first, my own testimony about his truthfulness and then the testimony of people who had known him over a long period of years.

As I have already pointed out in the Introduction, I had many opportunities for coming in close contact with him. I can emphatically say that I never found him deliberately twisting facts or telling lies. A man who is given to prevarication is likely to betray himself in many ways, particularly in the intimacy of his private life. A great deal was written about him by various people. Some of this was submitted to him for his correction. But he led an exceedingly busy life and could not find the time to revise carefully the manuscripts which were sent to him. Several books, pamphlets and articles were written about him which he never saw before they came out in print and he could not have corrected all the misstatements in them about him. It is unfortunate that we cannot get eye-witnesses for all the events described by him. Professor Heiler's books give the evidence of eye-witnesses for many of the events but not for all. To say that the events did not happen or that Sundar Singh was a liar because of the lack of evidence from eye-witnesses is quite unreasonable, whatever value it may have as a method of historical investigation.

I should like now to add the testimony of those who knew him over a long period of years.

The Rev. E. E. Fife, Principal, Ewing Christian High School, Ludhiana, where Sundar Singh received his early education, wrote to Professor Heiler thus about Sundar Singh on January 22, 1925 :

“ I have known Sundar Singh from boyhood as it was to us that he came when he first left his father's house. I well remember the time when, after he had been given poison, he had been cared for in the home of the Rev. P. C. Uppal of Rupar. He came back to us still weak after what we considered and still consider a marvellous deliverance from death by poison.

“ Since the first day he came to us until the present I have followed his course with the keenest interest. He has been in strange situations, in strange places and in many lands and it would have been passing strange if he had only such experiences as are common to us Christians, whose lives have been passed in everyday surroundings.

“Sundar Singh is a mystic and a saint. He is a sane, truthful, wholesome, thoroughly human man as well—one of the truest it has been my happiness to know.”<sup>1</sup>

The Rev. T. E. Riddle of the New Zealand Presbyterian Mission, Kharar, had known him from the year 1912 and in latter years had come into very intimate contact with him. He had helped Sundar Singh to translate his devotional books from Urdu into English. Sundar Singh had appointed him one of the three trustees to administer the Trust Fund which he had created, mainly from royalties on his books. When no news was heard of Sundar Singh after he undertook his last journey to Tibet, along with Dr. Taylor Mr. Riddle went on a perilous journey among the fastnesses of the Himalayas in search of the Sadhu. Mr. Riddle published in 1946 in *The United Church Review*, India, a series of articles about Sundar Singh. In the article in August 1946 he said :

“Many of us in India had long years of intimate contact with the Sadhu. It is not necessary for us to vindicate him. We know that he was a man of God. His personal spiritual life was a consistent witness to the fact that God was with him. God called him and used him in South India, and in Eastern and Western countries. We know that he did visit Tibet frequently, that he did fast to the limits of his strength near Dehra Dun ; we know that his visions were no hallucinations but real unveilings of unseen mysteries. We know that he was sane, shrewd, and level-headed in his judgment and was not dominated by gusts of sentiment. To him the presence of the living Lord was very real, and the joy of that presence dwarfed every other human joy.”

Archbishop Soderblom of Uppsala wrote to Sundar Singh thus on January 12, 1925. “As soon as I read about the attacks on you, I published at the request of our greatest papers an explicit declaration, and I am glad that I was right in my supposition or rather I am sorry to see how un-Christian and immoral Roman Catholic polemics can be. I am now writing an article on you more from a theological point of view, stating that the Roman Catholics who are sincere, ask themselves with anxiety : Can there be saints outside the Roman and Papal hierarchy ? and Roman apologists try to get rid of that difficulty by using any means, even untruth. I also try to show that the miracle, in the sense of a miraculous event against the laws of Nature, has a great place in popular and learned Roman religion, as well as in primitive faith. But, according to our Lord, miracle is nothing negative but something positive, the revelation of God’s wonderful answer to the prayers of the heart. You have advanced the same evangelical theory of miracle.

<sup>1</sup> From the Subathu papers.

“ You have no better friend in Europe than Professor Heiler in Marburg, whom I love and admire, and with whom I have had the most intimate spiritual communion since he sent me his first great book on Prayer, where he has adopted my general view of religious development, and the differences between revealed religion and general mysticism. He is the greatest genius Roman Catholicism has ever had on comparative religion. But by reading Martin Luther, he recognized the New Testament and became an evangelical.

“ God bless all sincere and true hearts, who love Him for His own sake, and their fellow-men for their own sake, and who put God’s rule above human considerations. Therefore I bless you, and I am, with benediction and friendship, sincerely your N. SODERBLOM. ”<sup>1</sup>

Archbishop Soderblom wrote again to Sundar Singh thus on March 18, 1925, about the controversy : “ This story is a dark chapter in the history of the Jesuits and of the vices of ‘ Churchianity ’. But it cannot but serve God’s Kingdom, and I wish you heartily strength and trust for fulfilling your great vocation.”<sup>1</sup>

We may now resume the narrative of his life at Subathu :

His old friend Dr. E. Morris Wherry wrote to him on April 7, 1925, that Professor Richter of the University of Berlin had given a lecture in Cincinnati, U.S.A., on Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and Sadhu Sundar Singh. The lecturer maintained that these three men typified three ideas of new life and thought in India. Tagore, poet and prophet, was a representative of the intellectual awakening in India. Mahatma Gandhi was a political leader standing for a united India and struggling for Independence by peaceful methods. Sundar Singh was a mystic who sought to establish a new India on a Christian foundation. Mysticism had never been popular in Germany and Professor Richter held that Sundar Singh would not succeed. Dr. Wherry reported in his letter that he spoke to the lecturer and pointed out to him that if Sundar Singh was striving to build up something of his own, he would not succeed, but that he was being used of God to build up His Kingdom and for that reason he could not fail.

In April 1925 Sundar Singh wrote to a friend thus : “ While in Lahore the Indian Christian there wanted me to accept an offer to be the Bishop of the ‘ Indian Church ’, not of the ‘ Church of England in India ’ or some other denomination. When I refused this, they appointed me to be the president or chairman of a big committee of persons who are trying their best to establish a purely Indian Church ; although I refused, they forced me. I don’t like to

<sup>1</sup> From the Subathu papers.

have any big position. I like to remain a humble servant of our dear Lord."<sup>1</sup>

While Sundar Singh was the subject of considerable hostile criticism in certain Roman Catholic circles, a French Roman Catholic paper called *L'Ordre Chrétien* published in May 1925 an enthusiastic article about him and his work. The writer contended that Sundar Singh was a member of the true Catholic Church, for "where there is Christ there is the Catholic Church" and that God had called Sundar Singh to bring back the Protestants to the true unity of Christ. This Roman Catholic author was convinced that Sundar Singh had really experienced miracles.

On October 26, 1925, Sundar wrote to Professor Heiler :

"As I returned last month from a preaching tour in the villages, my eye became inflamed and caused me great pain. Perhaps I have to suffer like other servants of God, such as St. Francis of Assisi who suffered much from an affliction of the eyes. I am not sorry about this suffering because it is a great privilege to be allowed to suffer in this way ; it is a means of blessing for me as it keeps me humble and gives me an opportunity for prayer and intercession. I do not want to be at all sad if I should lose my sight, for God has opened my spiritual eyes which can never become dim. I thank God for this gift and this blessing. I thank you for your prayers and I likewise continue to pray for you."<sup>2</sup>

On November 30, 1925, Sundar Singh made a will leaving his money for certain charitable purposes. His father had given him some money in his will. Royalties from his books were coming in. With the help of the Government pleader at Ambala, Sundar Singh drew up a will in very clear and precise terms. The income from his Government securities was to be spent for these purposes:

1. The training and salary of a young man who would take up evangelistic work in the hill states of the Himalayas.
2. Scripture prizes to boys not over sixteen years of age for proficiency in general knowledge of parts of the New Testament.
3. Prizes to mission workers for proficiency in general knowledge of the whole Bible.
4. Scholarships for study for five years or more to boys of about twelve years of age.
5. Scholarships to evangelistic workers for theological study at a recognized seminary.
6. Scholarships to other promising persons for the study and teaching of the New Testament.

<sup>1</sup> From the Subathu papers.

<sup>2</sup> Heiler, *Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*, p. 19.

The will named three executors—the Rev. T. E. Riddle of the New Zealand Presbyterian Mission, the Rev. Chandu Lal of the C.M.S. in Simla, and the General Secretary of the National Missionary Society of India in Madras. It also made provision for the appointment of other trustees should any of these resign or die.

At the time the will was drawn up the trust fund was worth Rs. 12,000. One of the trustees informed me on November 5, 1949 (twenty-four years after the trust was created), that the fund was then about Rs. 70,000.

I should like to add that Sundar Singh's letters written after the execution of the will show how careful and diligent he was in adding to the trust every sum of money which came into his hands from his books.

## CHAPTER 16

### VISIONS OF THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

1926-1929

DURING the last years of life Sundar Singh became more and more absorbed in the problems of the hereafter. Far more clearly than before he felt the nearness and the reality of the life to come.

To most of us, life after death is a remote thing : we either do not think of it at all, or think of it only vaguely. Not so to Sundar Singh ; it was utterly real and vivid to him. He longed to pass through the transition which we know as death and to reach the fuller experience beyond. The fact that his health had not been as good as before naturally led him to dwell more often on the future life and he had also more time on hand. Further, he was fully conscious of the truth that it is only on this earth, with its peculiar circumstances of suffering and sorrow, that our spiritual capacities can grow. Therefore this life has genuine value, and we should be eternally grateful to God for making us pass through it. That a man so young (thirty-seven years of age) should be absorbed in the problems of the future life was strange, and yet not strange. For in this he was only showing that other-worldliness which had all along been the leading trait of his character.

George Barne, the Bishop of Lahore for many years, writes to me thus of Sundar Singh's contact with the world of spirits : " . . . He used to come and stay with me and my wife when I was Principal of the Lawrence Royal Military School at Sanawar in the Simla Hills and we both got to know him pretty well. It was the time he was suffering from his eyes and enduring a good deal of pain that the Sadhu from being an acquaintance became a friend. . . . He was in constant pain but had his own way of dealing with that. He used to go to his room for hours on end and abstract himself from the world of time into the world of spirits. He would emerge several hours later greatly refreshed and rested and ready and willing to talk to one about the spirits he had met and with whom he had held converse. He spoke of them in an absolutely natural way as if he had been speaking to men and women he had



met in the bazaar or on the road. I have never personally met any one who gave one such a sense of reality of the spirit-world.

“ A curious incident comes into my mind as I write. The room which my wife gave him to sleep in was supposed to be haunted, by whom I never knew. Many people sleeping in that room had felt the presence of some one and used to mention this experience at breakfast next morning. Since the Sadhu occupied the room and used it as his ‘ port of embarkation ’ to the spirit-world, no one has ever mentioned the mysterious presence again. The room has ceased to be haunted. I cannot quite explain this phenomenon. Perhaps Sundar found some unhappy, restless spirit, spoke to him or her words of comfort and assurance and sent the unhappy one on the way happy and rejoicing ? I like to think of it like that. Sadhu Sundar Singh was one of the very few I have ever met who would, at any rate, have been equal to the occasion.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1926 Sundar Singh wrote a book entitled *Visions of the Spiritual World*. The Rev. T. E. Riddle, who helped him to translate the book into English, says that Sundar Singh felt a strong urge within him to publish his book of visions immediately. Sundar Singh wrote to Mr. Riddle that by its publication “ a great burden would be removed from my heart and it will indeed be a great relief ”. He had been advised to arrange for its publication after his death, but he said : “ I have been very anxious to have this book translated into English ; then it matters not if I live or die.”<sup>2</sup>

In his public addresses he never described his visions of the world of spirits, though he continually spoke about his vision of Christ which led to his conversion as well as about the miraculous experiences which took place in his life. This proves that he was not willing to speak in public about his visions of the spiritual world. At the same time the evangelistic urge in him to share with others the deepest truths which he had realized through his visions overcame his natural reticence in this matter. He was more ready to write about these experiences in a book than to speak about them in public meetings. He probably thought that the readers of his book would be more discerning in their judgment than the people who came to hear his addresses.

This book takes up such questions as : What happens at death ? What happens when a child dies and arrives in the spirit-world ? When a philosopher, who is intellectual and who applies to everything the tests of logic, philosophy and science, dies ? When a workman dies ? When a sceptic dies ? The judgment which takes place when a man who has wasted his opportunities, a murderer, a liar, an adulterer and a robber enter the spiritual world is

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated 15-9-1949.

<sup>2</sup> T. E. Riddle, *United Church Review*, August 1946.

described. The state of the righteous, the mansions of heaven and the heavenly life are also dealt with. The book closes with an account of the aim and purpose of creation. All these and other matters are treated by Sundar Singh in the light of the visions which he had seen.

I should like to quote here one or two passages of an autobiographical nature.

"A few months ago I was lying alone in my room suffering acutely from an ulcer in my eye. The pain was so great that I could do no other work, so I spent the time in prayer and intercession. One day I had been thus engaged for only a few minutes, when the spiritual world was opened to me, and I found myself surrounded by numbers of angels. Immediately I forgot all my pain, for my whole attention was concentrated on them."<sup>1</sup>

He continues his account thus: "The angels conversed with me about many matters, but it is impossible to record them, because, not only is there in the world no language, no simile, by which I could express the meaning of those very deep spiritual truths, but also they did not wish me to attempt it, for no one without spiritual experience can understand them, so, in that case, there is the fear that, instead of their being a help, they would be to many a cause of misunderstanding and error. I have, therefore, written only a few of the simplest of the matters talked over, in the hope that from them many may get direction and warning, teaching and comfort."<sup>2</sup>

He wrote thus about the beginning of his visions of the spiritual world: "At Kotgarh, fourteen years ago, while I was praying, my eyes were opened to the Heavenly Vision. So vividly did I see it all that I thought I must have died, and that my soul had passed into the glory of heaven; but throughout the intervening years these Visions have continued to enrich my life. I cannot call them up at will, but, usually when I am praying or meditating, sometimes as often as eight or ten times in a month, my spiritual eyes are opened to see within the heavens, and, for an hour or two, I walk in the glory of the heavenly sphere with Christ Jesus, and hold converse with angels and spirits. Their answers to my questions have provided much of the material that has already been published in my books, and the unutterable ecstasy of that spiritual communion makes me long for the time when I shall enter permanently into the bliss and fellowship of the redeemed."<sup>3</sup>

Sundar Singh thus distinguishes his visions from spiritualism: "Some may consider that these visions are merely a form of spiritualism, but I would emphasize that there is one very essential

<sup>1</sup> *Visions of the Spiritual World*, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> pp. 68, 69

<sup>3</sup> pp. xi, xii.

difference. Spiritualism does presume to produce messages and signs from spirits out of the dark, but they are usually so fragmentary and unintelligible, if not actually deceptive, that they lead their followers away from, rather than to, the truth. In these visions, on the other hand, I see vividly and clearly every detail of the glory of the spiritual world, and I have the uplifting experience of very real fellowship with the saints, amid the inconceivably bright and beautiful surroundings of a spiritual world made visible. It is from these angels and saints that I have received, not vague, broken and elusive messages from the unseen, but clear and rational elucidations of many of the problems that have troubled me."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. H. B. Durrant, who had been for several years Principal of St. John's College, Agra, and who was Bishop of Lahore before Bishop Barne, wrote a Foreword to *Visions of the Spiritual World*. In this Foreword he said that during the Transfiguration of Christ the veil which covered the unseen world was lifted for a moment so that the denizens of that world were visible and audible to human eyes and ears, and the glory of the real Jesus became manifest through the veil of His flesh. The bishop asked : " May it not be that this kind of experience is still given sometimes to God's servants ? I personally believe that the Sadhu's experiences recounted in these ' visions ' were something of this kind : that for him, as for these other servants of God, the veil which shrouds the real was lifted, so that he saw our Lord as He really is, and that world."

The publication of his book *Visions of the Spiritual World* led to a new and curious result. When I met Sundar Singh in 1928, he spoke with much enthusiasm of Swedenborg's books. The Swedenborg Society had sent him some of Swedenborg's writings, pointing out that in some respects Sundar Singh's experience was similar to Swedenborg's. These books, such as *Divine Love and Wisdom*, *Conjugal Love*, *Heaven and Hell* and two or three others, he had read with much interest. Sundar Singh said to me : " Swedenborg was a great man, philosopher, scientist and, above all, seer of clear visions. I often speak with him in my visions. He occupies a high place in the spiritual world. He is a glorious man, but modest and ever ready to serve. I, too, see wonderful things in the spiritual world, but I cannot describe them with the accuracy and ability which Swedenborg has. He is a highly-gifted and well-trained soul. Having read his books and having come in personal contact with him in the spiritual world, I can thoroughly recommend him as a great seer."

From December 26, 1927, to March 26, 1929, Sundar Singh carried on with John Goddard a correspondence about Swedenborg and his teaching. John Goddard was a Pastor Emeritus of

<sup>1</sup> *Visions of the Spiritual World*, pp. xii, xiii.

the Church of the New Jerusalem, popularly known as the Swedenborgian Church, and lived in Newtonville, Massachusetts, U.S.A. He was about ninety years of age and was held in much respect in the Swedenborgian Church.<sup>1</sup>

December 26, 1927.

Dear Sir :

Thank you for your letter of the 29th ultimo. In reply I want to say that after my book *Visions of the Spiritual World* was published, some friends sent me a copy of *Heaven and Hell* and I was amazingly glad to see that this wonderful man of God (Swedenborg) also had similar experiences. I should very much like to read more about this seer and saint.

With Christian greetings,  
Yours in His joyful service,  
(Sadhu) SUNDAR SINGH

May 30, 1928.

My friend :

Thank you so much for your letters of April 12th and 19th. I was out on my three weeks' preaching tour in the hills and on my return here received the following works of Swedenborg which you so very kindly sent to me : *Heaven and Hell*, *Conjugal Love*, *Divine Providence*, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, *Four Doctrines*, etc. I thank you heartily for this precious gift and treasure. . . . I shall be very thankful to have other works of Swedenborg on *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Revelation*, etc. If you would let me know the price, I will gladly pay for them, as I should not be a burden to you or other friends. I am so glad to see that many things which I have seen in the spiritual world and heavens are exactly the same as Swedenborg has described and written in his works. But there are also other things which I have not yet seen and which I find described in his books only. It may be that he was endowed with special gifts and appointed by the Lord for a special work, so that he was permitted to see far and wide in countless spheres and heavens and then described very many things, which I have not been able, or permitted as yet, to see. I think I am not yet fit, or have not yet reached that stage where the Lord could allow me to see further those things which our most venerable elder brother in the Lord, Swedenborg, saw. . . .

Yes, I have seen the venerable Swedenborg in my visions several times. He is a most lovable personality and has a very high position in heaven and is always joyfully busy in helping

<sup>1</sup> Sundar Singh wrote thirteen letters to John Goddard. Extracts are reprinted here by kind permission of the Editor of *The Helper*, in which magazine they appeared (Vol. 86, No. 8).

others but he is not called there by his earthly name. It is quite different but just according to his real self, which I cannot write. You will have the privilege of seeing him and the dear Lord before very long.

With all good wishes and Christian love,  
Your humble brother in our dear Lord  
and Saviour Jesus Christ,

SUNDAR SINGH

November 12, 1928.

My dear friend :

Thank you for your letter of October 11, 1928. . . .

Yes, I have talked with the venerable Swedenborg and some other saints and angels about the hells, although I am unable to explain adequately all that they told me. But it is somewhat like this : No spirit can exist forever, if separated from God by sin or evil. It must either cease to exist or return to God who is the source of life. There is no spirit which will ever cease to exist ; therefore every spirit finally must return to God, even though it may be after ages of ages. . . .

Now you are old, in your ninetieth year. Swedenborg says that " the time is not very far when I, with many others, will say, Welcome, Brother Goddard ; and he will be very happy and young for ever and ever."

May the Lord continue to bless you abundantly ; with all good wishes and love in the Lord.

Your brother in Him,

SUNDAR SINGH

January 2, 1929.

My dear friend :

Thank you for your letter which I have just received. I have had several talks with Swedenborg and some other saints and angels. They say that the hells are eternal in the sense that innumerable souls from many earths in the universe will continually enter into them according to their condition, as long as the creation of human beings continues ; but not in the sense that the same evil spirits will remain eternally in the hells. If it were so, then God's love and wisdom would not have created such spirits and He who is love can't see His creatures suffering in hells forever and ever, however wicked they may be ; the time will come when nothing will remain which is discordant and against the will of God. When even the hells will have fulfilled their purpose, then, finally and eternally, God will be all in all.

With regard to the doctrine of reincarnation and transmigration also, I have conversed with Swedenborg and some Hindu saints who, after entering into the spiritual world, have accepted the Lord as the only true God and Saviour and also those who have not yet accepted Him. They all say that reincarnation is impossible, although there are many who are anxious that if possible they would like to come and help their brothers and sisters on earth, and the Lord permits and appoints them to help others in the spiritual world instead of sending them to the earth. And there are others who wish to return to the earth in order to make up their losses and prepare themselves for heaven. They too are sent to a kind of reformatory and preparatory schools in the spiritual world, but are never sent to the earth for the purpose. Then, there are those spirits who attach themselves to men on earth in such a way that they enjoy many things and speak in such languages of which the men who are possessed know nothing at all. Swedenborg says that in *Heaven and Hell*, No. 256 ; he does not mean that the doctrine of reincarnation is true, but simply that the ancients thought it to be so. Of course, they were wrong to think so. . . .

I hope you are keeping well. May the Lord bless and grant you His own peace more and more abundantly, Amen.

With every good wish,  
Your brother in the Lord.

SUNDAR SINGH

March 11, 1929

My dear friend :

Thank you for your letter of February 7th which I received on my return from a long preaching tour in India. I am going out again this evening and shall be going to Tibet in April. No, I have never had such experiences like Swedenborg of conversation both with spirits and angels, and at the same time with men on earth. Of course, I receive many suggestions from angels while I converse with men.

Personally, I don't like and don't feel guided to organize any kind of society like Swedenborg and some other saints but there is nothing wrong if others feel guided by Him for some kind of organization to help others and to serve the Lord. Swedenborg also thinks so.

No, I was not converted through any missionary or by his preaching but by the vision of the Lord who revealed Himself to me when I was praying to God as a Hindu but not as a Christian. You will see an account of my conversion in the fifth chapter of my new book, *With and Without Christ*, which is

being published now. Yes, I find in the spiritual world scenes and things almost the same as Swedenborg has described in *Heaven and Hell*. Yes, I know Dr. Stanley Jones and his work in India. He is a friend of mine. I wish we could have many missionaries like him. I am very busy nowadays. I will let you know when I meet your boy in the spiritual world.

Now I close with all good wishes and love in the Lord,  
Your brother in the Lord,

SUNDAR SINGH

The Swedenborgians themselves were not agreed as to the value of Sundar Singh's conversations with Swedenborg's spirit. One of their leaders, John Goddard (as we have already seen), took these conversations seriously and encouraged Sundar Singh to seek further guidance from Swedenborg. Another leader of the Swedenborgian Church, however, George Henry Dole of Wilmington, Delaware, U.S.A., had much to say in criticism of these conversations. In *The Helper* (Vol. 86, No. 8) he pointed out that Swedenborg had asserted over and over again that the hells are eternal and that to reach heaven one's life here in this world must be fit for it. He showed that the Gospel of Mark 9 : 43-48 declared five times in six verses that the hells are eternal. He also held that Luke 16 : 26 taught the same doctrine. He gave several references to the writings of Swedenborg to support his position. If the talks with Swedenborg were regarded as genuine, Dole held that Swedenborg in this particular teaching repudiated from the spirit-world what he, while upon the earth, claimed to have derived not from himself or from any angel but from the Lord alone. If Swedenborg was wrong in one doctrine he may be wrong in all that he taught. Dole went on to say further that he saw no use in conversations today with Swedenborg. He maintained that the teaching of Swedenborg was true not because he gave it but because it was a revelation from the Lord Himself, and no one should desire any further confirmation.

What exactly is the value of the visions of the spiritual world which Sundar Singh saw ?

In modern times a great deal of trouble has been taken to carry on a scientific investigation of such phenomena. The Society for Psychological Research was founded in England in 1882 by a group of eminent scholars. Among its presidents have been such men as the American psychologist William James (who helped to found the American Society for Psychological Research); the physicists Sir William Crookes, Sir William Barrett, Sir Oliver Lodge; the French philosopher Henri Bergson; Professor Gilbert Murray; the psychologist William McDougall; the biology professor Hans Driesch; Professor C. D. Broad, Cambridge; Professor H. H. Price, Oxford; Dr. Robert Thouless, head of the Department of

Education, Cambridge University; while among the Society's members, past and present, have been a number of well-known scholars such as Sir J. J. Thomson, Dr. Julian Huxley, and others.

In 1885 the American Society for Psychical Research was founded, Professor Simon Newcomb being its first President. Among its other officers have been Professor G. Stanley Hall and Professor E. C. Pickering, while in our day research is being done under the direction of the psychologist Professor Gardner Murphy.

As a result of the strictly scientific studies carried on by such scholars, telepathy may now be regarded as an established fact. Some persons with psychic gifts are quite capable of understanding what other people think miles away without the use of any physical medium.

Following accepted methods of careful scientific investigation, modern psychical research has established that spirits can commune with each other without the help of physical means such as a human voice or a wireless apparatus. Experiments like those conducted by Wilkins and Sherman in 1937 and numerous other more recent experiments along the same lines have made it clear that thoughts can be sent through space. This removes a serious obstacle to a belief in the contact between spirits in this world and in the other world.

Dr. Herbert Pakenham-Walsh, formerly Bishop of Assam, and Mrs. Walsh met Sundar Singh not long before his last visit to Tibet and spent several hours of a Sunday with him on the slopes of the Himalayas beyond Narkonda. The Bishop took no notes of their conversation on that occasion. But his recollection is that their talk was mainly about the Sadhu's ecstasies and visions of heaven which he said were really inexpressible in earthly language and earthly figures. The bishop writes :

" I asked him whether his visions in trance might not be the result of conscious or sub-conscious thoughts which had occurred to him in waking life ; and he replied that he was quite sure the visions were real ; and he said that among the souls he saw come over from earth there was one whom he knew personally. This one asked him to help his widow when he returned to earth, as she did not know about the secret drawer in which her husband had hidden his will, and she was in danger of losing all her property unless the will could be found. He described to the Sadhu the secret drawer and how to open it. The Sadhu on regaining consciousness remembered this, and ascertained that this man had died. He went to his house and saw that things were just as his friend had described, and that the widow was in great distress. He found and opened the secret drawer, and there was the will, giving her the right to the property."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From the bishop's letter to me dated August 24, 1949.



Our knowledge of most incidents in the life of Sundar Singh depends solely on his own testimony. The circumstances under which such events took place are not easy to check as he was a wandering Sadhu and came in contact with a wide variety of people. Those who have known him over a long period of years, however, are absolutely convinced of his transparent honesty. We may, therefore, accept the genuineness of the incident which Sundar Singh related to the bishop.

We may grant that there are spirits living in the other world. We may grant also that such spirits are willing and able to speak to us here on this earth, provided we are sensitive enough to receive their message. On these grounds, can we say that every message which Sundar Singh and others claim to have received from the world of spirits is really so? The human mind plays havoc even with our highest thoughts. In listening to a wireless we often note that the fine music which comes from a radio station gets mixed up with many kinds of noises which prevail in the atmosphere. Even those like Sundar Singh who are psychic and can hear and see what happens in the world of spirits often have uprushes from their unconscious, mingling with their deeper spiritual insights. Eternal vigilance is necessary to distinguish the messages of the spirits from the activities of the unconscious, which can often dress themselves up in garments of shining beauty. The truth of such messages must, therefore, be continually tested by reference to the Word of God and to the teaching of the Christian Church through which God has clearly revealed Himself to us.

## CHAPTER 17

### THE LAST YEARS

1926-1929

DR. PEOPLES, who shared Sundar Singh's house at Subathu, wrote in April 1926 to Miss Sanders<sup>1</sup> in England :

“ Our dear brother Sundar Singh's left eye operation has been performed by an Indian eye specialist successfully in Amritsar, about which he must have written to you. His sight is improved and nowadays he is very busy writing another book.”

The Rev. T. E. Riddle spent some days with Sundar Singh at Subathu and reported that on May 14, 1926, Sundar spoke to him about three heart attacks in the previous December, when he became unconscious, and said : “ I want once more to go to Tibet. I will go by Almora. It has been revealed to me that my time is short now and I am very glad. I have only a great joy as I think of death.”

Sundar wrote to Mr. Riddle on June 10, 1926, about the controversy regarding his truthfulness, and said :

“ Well, my dearest friend, I don't bother much about this criticism, because God knows that, in spite of my unworthiness and weakness, I have by His grace tried my best to do my part and now let the world and Satan do their part : the result in the end will be quite satisfactory for the glory of God ; that is why He permits such things to happen. I know my shortcomings and unworthiness, but it is not hidden, nor will the Heavenly Father allow it to remain unknown, that my whole desire and aim has been to spend the days of my youth for Him and in His name for my fellow beings. I leave the rest in His hands. Now my prayer is that He may allow me to go to Tibet once more, before my departure from this world into His glory.

“ With regard to my tours in Tibet, I am sorry to say that I never kept any diary or notebook in those days, I never had any intention of writing anything nor did I think that it would be of any use. So, I don't remember the exact times and names of all the places. But

<sup>1</sup> She had written a book about Sundar Singh and had become his friend.

I do remember that I used to go to Tibet almost every year from 1912 to 1921 except 1918 and 1920 and I also remember the names of some big places. From Almora side, on the way to Tibet, I visited Pithorogarh, Askot, Dharchula and Taklakot. From Badrinath side I crossed Niti Pass, 16,750 feet high, and then went into Tibet proper and visited Daba, Toling, Chuprang, Dongba, Gyanema, Barkha and Kailash ; from there I went towards Tashilumpo. There are several places between Kailash and Rasar, which is a small place. From Kailash it took about two weeks to reach Rasar. From Nepal side also I entered into Tibet. "

Sundar also wrote to Professor Heiler, on June 17, 1926.

" I am not sorry or worried about the criticism and attack of my dear enemies because the time will come when everything will be revealed and truth will conquer. But it pains me that you are being persecuted on my account. Dear friend, I beg you to stop defending me because you must use your valuable time not for me but for your good work for the Lord. I thank you heartily for your love, but do now allow the people to persecute me in all possible ways !"

C. F. Andrews said in a letter to the Rev. E. Schwab, June 18, 1926 :

" I cannot add much to what I have already written except to say again that I thoroughly believe in the sincerity of Sadhu Sundar Singh after having lived with him at Kotgarh in earlier years when he was with Mr. Stokes and seen the manner of life and complete self-sacrifice and devotion to the poor and readiness to undertake the lowest and meanest duties. I have also seen him suffer for Christ's sake. . . . He is a mystic with the highest imaginative faculties in which the objective and subjective are at times singularly difficult to separate or analyse apart, and certain of the things which he has recorded may have this aspect of the subjective realized objectively by high imaginative power : but this is altogether different from conscious deceit. He is to be compared with the medieval saints of the Church who had similar powers of objective vision of subjective things. His truly humble and self-sacrificing life has done more to uplift the whole Indian Christian Church than that of any other saintly man today and he gives us a picture of what truly indigenous Indian Christian life may be able to perform in sacrifice, devotion and service. "

During the controversy Sundar approached his American friend of earlier years, S. E. Stokes, for a testimony and received from him a letter written on June 21, 1926 :

" What you suggest in your letter has received my anxious thought and I am not sure exactly what my duty is in the matter.

" You probably do not know that I have received a very large number of letters, and even cablegrams with regard to the matter,

both from those who are convinced that every thing written in the books about you and ascribed to you is strictly accurate, and those who take the opposite position. Let me say, at once, that I have never lost my respect for you, or failed to believe that you have had a very useful life and been an inspiration to many, both here and in the West. Also I may say that I have not ever lost the conviction that to the best of your light and strength you have been trying to serve your Master. I also well remember your devotion and willingness to suffer when we were together, and have borne testimony to this in the books published by me in those early days. From them your friends are always at liberty to draw, and have done so often.

“ But when we were together, as you will remember, there was no question about those later accounts of adventures in Tibet and Nepal. Of some of these I am not for a moment in a position to offer an opinion, for I was not with you, and of the strict accuracy of others, I prefer as far as possible to say nothing, for I feel that they fail in accuracy.

“ This does not mean, however, that I hold you guilty of intentional lack of accuracy. I have made my position clear upon this point in a confidential letter that I wrote to Mrs. Parker several years ago, in an earnest attempt to dissuade her and her friends from entering into a controversy with the Jesuits as to the strict accuracy of the various statements that had been ascribed to you.

“ I hold you to be of a mystical temperament and think that you at times fail to distinguish, as clearly as might be, the border-line that runs between the subjective and the objective in experience. Where Paul took care to make it plain that in his experiences he was unable to say whether they were ‘in the spirit’ or not, you—especially in your younger days—failed to do this. I am not referring so much to your accounts of heaven as to your accounts of things that you experienced in this life.

“ Possibly I am wrong, but it has seemed to me that in these later years you have talked less of Sundar, and more of his Master, and I have been glad.

“ I honour you for what you have done of service, and whatever hardships you passed through in the days I knew you well, and what you may have passed through unknown to me. I honour you also, when I remember that you were only a little village lad, with no particular education, and brought up until the time that you became a Christian in the midst of the superstitions and atmosphere of the miraculous that constitutes the religious life of the Punjab village, and that in spite of that you were led by your enthusiasm to leave your home, and subsequently spend your life in preaching in the name of your Master, not only in India but in all countries. To me, it is this that makes you worthy of respect—not the various

adventures you are said to have been through, or the various miracles that you are said to have witnessed. Finally, if I see that you rise in the end to caring nothing for what people think of you, and to complete allegiance to that only which is the very truth, at whatever cost to your personal reputation, then indeed I shall feel that your life has not only been a remarkable and striking one, but a triumphant example of the ennobling and transfiguring power of the Spirit of God, who is Truth.

“Possibly you have done so. I cannot say. I seem to see inaccuracies and other things which have not been true to the objective side of life. Yet to you, subjectively they may have had a complete reality.

“I have tried for old friendship’s sake to be frank, for I should love to be able to add my testimony to that of others. Be patient with me if I am unable to do so.”<sup>1</sup>

Sundar’s own view was that Stokes was a modernist and did not believe in miracles.

Dr. Stanley Jones wrote to Sundar on July 20, 1926 :

“I hope some time during the year I may have the privilege of being with you. We shall then be able to talk over many of these things together. In the meantime let me assure you of my utmost confidence in you as a man of God and as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. My advice in this troublesome hour to you would be that you say as little as possible about those who are doubting your sincerity. You can pray much for them but say as little as possible. I feel that you are doing this and perhaps the advice is superfluous.”<sup>1</sup>

Sundar Singh wrote to the Rev. T. E. Riddle on August 7, 1926 :

“Rev. G.D. Barne of Sanawar (later Bishop of Lahore) and the Bishop of Lahore came to see me last Tuesday and on Wednesday I had a very bad attack of pain in the heart. I was half unconscious. Now I am feeling better again.”

And then on September 16 :

“ . . . My health is about the same and sometimes gets very bad, and so it is not possible for me to promise to attend the meetings in November at Kharar, for which I am extremely sorry. If I keep well, I hope to attend the Saugor (C.P.) Convention and some others in November but I have not promised to attend any. My stomach also is giving me trouble. It is good to have all these experiences and troubles before leaving the body, it really helps me spiritually.”

On September 30 :

<sup>1</sup> From the Subathu papers.

“ Yes, I will try my best to have the great pleasure of your fellowship in October or November, D.V. ; my plan is very uncertain, because quite suddenly I get the attacks. I know my time of promotion into His glory is not very far off, but I am praying that God may grant me to go to Tibet once more. It is just possible that my prayer may be answered miraculously. Spiritually I am quite happy but physically I am having rather unpleasant experience since my return from Kotgarh, but this experience also has a peculiar pleasantness and benefit.

“ God is continually sending my audiences here for me to preach to. It is wonderful to see how highly educated Hindus come to see me and ask for spiritual advice—Hindu Editors of papers such as *Tij* of Delhi and Headmasters and Professors from different places, besides European officers and non-officers. So some work is going on in spite of my illness, for which I thank God.”

Emil H. Frimodt, who had published Sundar's books in Danish, wrote to him on October 22, 1926 :

“ We have just published a new catalogue. I have the pleasure of sending you a copy. On pages 12-13 you will find your books and yourself mentioned. Under the portrait is written:

“ This Indian Sadhu is not only a man deeply touched by Christ, he is one of the GREAT in our times, one of those few who will have world-historical importance in the kingdom of the spirit. So writes Professor Ed. Geismar (Copenhagen) on Sundar Singh, whose works are translated all over the world and in Denmark alone are printed 162,000 copies.”

“ I can tell you that in Norway the discussion about you is rather busy. Here in Denmark the interest in all these articles is very little. All your friends from 1922 are yet persuaded that you are the man of whose personality and Christian truth they got so unforgettable impressions themselves, and they do not wish to listen to the words of your enemies. Your new book is selling very well.”<sup>1</sup>

While the controversy about Sundar Singh's truthfulness raged in Europe, the Rev. E. Schwab, who was working as a Swiss missionary at Hubli in Bombay State, went to Subathu and investigated on the spot how the charges against him could be dealt with. I give below extracts from a long German letter written by him about this matter on May 5, 1927, to Pastor G. Secretan in Switzerland.

“ Did you read what Pfister wrote recently in the *Ostasienjahrbuch* about the Sadhu? There he is now called a crafty impostor. I never saw such a twisting of facts. . . .

[At Subathu] “ the Sadhu met me in the village and led me to his house. He greeted me with his usual cordiality and openness. We

<sup>1</sup> From the Subathu papers.

spent two happy days together. He still remembers most of the places and persons he got to know during his tour in Switzerland. He did not care much about the attacks made against him, but he was terribly sorry that his friends had so much trouble because of them. Again and again he said how sorry he was that I had to travel so far because of them. The most reasonable of all judgments on these attacks was what I heard from his own lips : ' It does not matter if I am attacked, even if I am called in Europe an impostor. ' Very simply, without any boasting, he continued : ' If through my work only one soul has found God, I shall feel more than rewarded for all my effort. But I can even hope —God be thanked —that more than one soul has been blessed. If these souls have heard and believed the true Gospel, then their salvation cannot be impaired through the attacks made on me. But if these people suffer because the Sadhu is called an impostor, then they have not heard the true Gospel, but they have heard only the Sadhu. ' . . .

" There may be much strife and controversy about the Sadhu in the world, but in his nearest environment I found peace, as far as I could see in those days. The people around the Sadhu cannot understand why there is a fight against him in Europe. It is a pity that there is such a strife about the Sadhu in Europe : it is significant, however, for the genuineness of his character that there is only peace around him. The judgment of these people who always live close to him is certainly more weighty. . . .

" I noticed also (wherever I went) that our Sadhu is looked upon as a genuine disciple of Jesus, honoured and loved by all. This statement, however, I have to qualify since I learnt, just before my departure, about the miserable plotting in Subathu itself of the Sadhu's adversaries from both of the well-known camps in order to throw dirt on the name of the man they hate so much. But these attacks in the dark will be to their own detriment. I had little time to have intimate conversation with the Sadhu, as it took so long to work through the heaps of accusations and to check many a document. The Sadhu was quite ready to do that, but he left the initiative entirely to me. I could not find much new material with him which will be of decisive importance for his defence. In this regard my journey was not as successful as I had hoped for, in the interest of the Sadhu and, above all, in the interest of Truth.

" But when I went by moonlight back again to the railway station on the wonderful mountain track, I felt warm in my heart, despite the icy cold, as I surveyed in thought the experience of the past two days. The simple genuineness and warmth of Christian fellowship, without any extravagance, and the depth of thought—all that made a deep impression of joy within me, so that I felt happy like the disciples when they descended from Mount Tabor. Of course, I do not intend to compare the Sadhu with Christ. To me he is not an apostle (even in a special sense). In

him I have seen only a simple but through and through genuine Christian and more he never pretended to be himself.

“ A mighty impression I received from those mountains, because I studied on the map, with the Sadhu himself, some of his journeys. Seeing in front of me the plains and behind me the lofty Himalayas, one can guess what these journeys must have been like when the young Sadhu with his blanket and Bible travelled alone around the hills. There is hardly any valley, any important place which he does not know. I saw the way going deep down into the valley and again mounting steeply up for eight hours, which the boy travelled on Saturday to Simla before his baptism on Sunday. And on the following Monday he came back the same way. A month after, he started his wanderings as a Christian Sadhu into this wide, wild world. The man beside me told me all this without any pretence and I got the impression that his memories (if one can find the right way to get them narrated) could tell far more than I was capable of finding through my enquiries. He appeared to me a hero, though I do not like hero-worship.

“ In North India I had the privilege of meeting several people who love and esteem the Sadhu. Among others I met Dr. E. E. Fife, the missionary who had the boy Sadhu in his school and who ever since has been his fatherly friend. Among missionaries in India I find few who are as learned as this old gentleman and, above all, I know few who think as sharply and clearly as he does. He regretted, of course, that there are incorrect statements in the biographical literature about the Sadhu, which can only with difficulty be corrected now. He said that if someone could prove that the Sadhu himself, with a view to deceive, sent those well-known telegrams, that would be a slap in the face for us. But he knows the Sadhu too well, as a very healthy man and as a very genuine Christian, to believe this charge of his adversaries without well-founded proofs. Thus he feels that we should not bother about the cries of his accusers. In one or two things one could leave one's judgment in suspense. He was of the opinion that the time will come when the Sadhu will be splendidly justified. When a man like Dr. Fife does not give up Sundar Singh, we may confidently dare to be on his side. We are left with the great task of searching and proving all the so-called statements of his accusers. The Sadhu is not afraid of the light and we Christians of Europe, who love him, ought also not to behave as if we were afraid of the light.”

From October 24 to 31, 1928, I spent a week with Sundar Singh. At that time he lived at Subathu in a bungalow on the top of a pine-clad hill. About a mile of narrow, winding path led up to the house. From his verandah were seen the Himalayas, lying range beyond range, eternally the same and yet ever changing. In the early hours



of the morning a slight haze enveloped the mountains and their outlines were not clear. Later in the day even the trees on the neighbouring peaks were seen, the more remote peaks melting into the blue distance. On moonlight nights the hills slumbered like mighty giants wrapped in dark robes. The clouds floated on all day long, forming themselves into innumerable shapes. On clear days Simla, the summer capital of the Government of India, was visible in the distance, lying like a small patch dotted with white specks. Sundar Singh's house stood by itself, hedged off from the rest of Subathu by the "jungles" which he loved so well; of similar "jungles" he often spoke in his sermons and books. At the bottom of the hill in a secluded spot a hyena lived. This hyena prowled about the neighbourhood at night in search of food: once or twice its cry was heard near the verandah. The barracks and bazaars of Subathu, a small military station, lay out of earshot. The only sounds which were heard from Sundar Singh's house were the occasional songs of birds and the jingling of bells on pack-ponies as they trotted along a neighbouring road. The motor-car did not invade this retreat, as the hill was too steep.

When I saw Sundar in 1923 he was living in a small house, bought with his father's money, near the congested and noisy bazaar; but his health had been so poorly of late that he had to move into this quiet house in a healthy locality. He had presented the house near the bazaar to the devoted friends who nursed him back to life during a serious illness. The present house was the property of the American Presbyterian Mission. This Mission was closing its work at Subathu and sold the house to the Sadhu for a considerably reduced price. It was built about a hundred years ago, and showed everywhere signs of its age. Like most bungalows occupied by missionaries, it was roomy and comfortable, without being palatial or luxurious. Dr. J. W. Peoples and his family had moved into one part of the house. Dr. Peoples still worked in the Leper Asylum near by. For over five years he and Mrs. Peoples had been of great help to the Sadhu; whenever Sundar Singh was at Subathu he boarded with them; if he was ill, as he often was in those years, they looked after him. They had furnished the front room of the house simply but tastefully with well-chosen curtains and cushions, thus creating a home atmosphere for the Sadhu. Here he spent most of his time.

In his rooms Sundar Singh kept a few photographs of his friends. There were photographs of Professor Heiler, the Archbishop of Uppsala, the Bishop of Lahore, and Miss Sanders. Also of Prince and Princess Oscar Bernadotte. Prince Bernadotte was a brother of the King of Sweden; while in Sweden, the Sadhu had been the Prince's guest. There were also photographs of Comte and Comtesse de Korff, Russian nobles then living in Switzerland; both of them were fine Christians. An excellent portrait of Sundar Singh

himself was on one of the walls, hung there, he explained, by the kindly insistence of his friends. An enlarged photograph in sepia, sold by the Association Press in Calcutta, it was well done and was appreciated by his friends. Sundar Singh was also seen standing with his friends in different photographs, mostly snapshots taken during his travels. A favourite pose was that in which he was seen sitting with the children of the hosts who entertained him while abroad. His love of children also explained the presence in his room of two copies of a popular picture of Jesus sitting with children of different races. A Hindu girl clad in a sari was on His lap ; a Chinese boy, a European girl and a girl from the South Sea Islands stood nearby ; an African boy sat down in front and gazed into His face. There were also several other pictures of Jesus.

On two small shelves there were a few books, some of them showing marks of careful study. Most of these books had been sent at different times by his friends. Of books in general he did not speak with the enthusiasm of the book-lover, but with the grudging appreciation of the anti-intellectualist who had been betrayed into reading them by the kindness of friends. In a semi-apologetic way he confessed that he had read some of them in order to find out what the world had to say on different branches of learning. Though he spoke of different subjects, science and philosophy seemed to have attracted him most. Among the books I noticed Windleband's *History of Philosophy*, F. C. S. Schiller's *Humanism*, William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* and *Textbook of Psychology*, and Streeter's *Reality*. He had read Sheppard's *The Impatience of a Parson*, and agreed with much of what he said. Of Boehme he spoke with some interest : " When I returned from Europe, I began reading Boehme and was attracted to him as soon as I had read the first two or three pages. I may be wrong, but I am more and more convinced that simple people like Boehme have a pure intuition and grasp easily and readily profound truths. Learned people, especially those I met in Europe, repress their native intuition and substitute in its place an artificial intuition. That is why Christ called as His disciples not rabbis, but simple fishermen. "

Sundar Singh's enemies were not slow to point out that in buying a house he had not lived up to his Sadhu ideal. During the week I spent with him our conversation turned on more than one occasion to this subject. This is the gist of what he said :

" My ideal has never been renunciation for the sake of renunciation. There is no merit attached to renunciation. Everything in the world has been created by God, and whatever God has created is good. The harm comes, not when we use God's gifts, but when we misuse them. . . . I have never asked anyone for money, but the money has come unasked. As it has proved, it has been of great use to me during months of serious illness and subsequent weak-

ness. But I am sure that, even if I had not had any money, my loving Father would have provided for me. The disciples were not given any money first. When they had learnt the lesson that God would provide for their needs, they were allowed to handle money. Such has also been my experience. When I had no money, there was not a single occasion when I had to suffer. Also, in my present state of weak health, I am not able to go out on long tours. I am using my time and limited energy in writing books. When I began writing them I did not think I would get any money for them. But now royalties are coming in. I am using as little as possible on myself and giving away the rest to God's work."

One day we passed a Sadhu meagrely clad, his whole body coated with sacred ashes and his hair matted. He was trudging along the road from Simla, with an iron trident in his hand. Young, well-built and strong, his appearance in such an unexpected place led us to talk of Sadhus. "He seems to be a beggar," Sundar Singh said. "Some smear sacred ashes as they are a protection against the cold. There are very few genuine Sadhus about. Most of them are beggars." On this and other occasions I found that in his mind a Sadhu is one who does not beg. Sanyasis in India seemed to divide themselves, in his view, into two classes—Sadhus and beggars; the former real seekers after truth, the latter wearing the Sadhu's robe for a livelihood. This distinction, however interesting it may be as Sundar's view, is hardly in keeping with traditional ideas in India. Hindu Sanyasis beg as a matter of course, and, as far as I know, there is no injunction in their sacred books against begging. Among the Buddhists, monks are called *Bikshus* or beggars.

We also often talked of Christian Sadhus. "Like frogs in the rainy season, several of them have sprung up. One or two seem to be doing good work, but the others are no good. Some of them give out falsely that they are sent by me. The Sadhu's calling is a high and noble one, much respected in India. That is why I do not feel called to train up Sadhus in an Ashram, as there is very great danger of their falling below the ideal."

It may be noted that what he said during that week on renunciation was quite in line with what he had been saying all along.<sup>1</sup> Whether a man following the Sadhu ideal should own a house, even if his health begins to fail, is an open question. He certainly should not if he follows the Hindu ideal of renunciation and even the Christian ideal of poverty still practised in monastic circles, Roman Catholic as well as Protestant. But the history of Christian monasticism is, I think, sufficiently clear in its teaching. What is needed is the ideal of simplicity and not that of poverty. The money we are given is God's money, and, reducing our personal wants to the lowest possible minimum—this is where the difference between

<sup>1</sup> See B. H. Streeter and A. J. Appasamy, *The Sadhu*, pp. 88-90.

the wordly man and the selfless Christian will become apparent—we should devote the rest to God's glory. In his way of life Sundar Singh was still as simple as before, wearing the simplest clothes and eating plain food. He might perhaps have avoided all this criticism by joining some religious community and living under a monastic roof in semi-retirement. But temperamentally Sundar Singh was unfitted for such an environment. He flourished best in a home environment, such as the one where he lived at Subathu.

Several of his friends were deeply concerned about his health. It will be remembered that, though the Sadhu was not yet forty, he had begun his active career twenty-three years previously when his physical powers were probably not even fully developed. During those years he had travelled much and worked hard. At times he had been put to unusual hardship and suffering. He had literally poured himself out. As he said, "It is better to burn quickly and melt many souls than to burn slowly and not melt any." In every public address he felt virtue going out of him, power reaching out from personality to touch personality. Such constant public work was exhausting. "I am glad I have been able to devote the best period of my life to God's work. This was the prayer of my youth, and it has been answered." On his tours even the kindness of friends, he pointed out, was killing, for after a day full of meetings they would beg him to join in some social function and to sit up late. All this strain was bearing fruit.

He had constant trouble with his heart. A doctor said to him, "You have crushed your heart by over-work. Have you forgotten that it is the temple of God?" Sundar Singh was now unable to undertake long journeys and constant speaking engagements. His stores of energy had become much curtailed and he had to husband them as best possible. His declining health had imprinted itself on his personal appearance—the beard had begun to grey and a bald patch had appeared. Otherwise he looked the same as before, noble and impressive, peace written on every line of his face. He wore dark glasses all the time, as his eyes were weak and could not stand the glare.

But it was not in Sundar Singh to keep quiet. The passion for work consumed him still, though his response could not be as ungrudging as before. His quiet retreat had its carefully regulated life. He went out every month on "short" preaching tours; the word "short" in India meant sometimes a railway journey of two or three days, and often of at least a day. When he stayed at home he was busy with prayer and meditation, correspondence, personal interviews and literary work.

His prayer and meditation occupied a considerable share of his time. "Peace has been the greatest tonic in my weakness. Life is sometimes unpleasant on account of constant ill-health, but

never unhappy." Some correspondents had suggested to him that the experience of peace which he enjoyed was the result of auto-suggestion. He was particularly anxious to refute this idea. It was impossible for him to believe that all this experience was purely subjective. There was a subjective element in it, he admitted, for *he* enjoyed this peace. But the peace itself arose from the Objective Reality, God. "How, otherwise," he passionately asked, "can this experience have continued with me all these years? Several philosophers have been thinking hard for years, but have never attained peace. How can the mere fact of my dwelling upon the idea bring about such a result?"

He was faithful in answering his numerous correspondents from all over the world with diligence and care. Many wrote to him, laying before him their spiritual difficulties. Others wrote thanking him for the help and inspiration which his books had given them. Some wrote friendly letters, sending him their greetings. To all these he sent prompt, though brief, replies.

He also received a number of visitors, who consulted him about their spiritual difficulties. Once he had a strange interview. An Arya Samaj preacher came to see him with the deliberate intent of winning a victory over him in debate. He also brought with him two or three people to witness his triumph. Sundar Singh allowed him to talk as long as he liked. The quiet way in which he listened gave the Arya Samaj preacher the impression that he was winning an easy victory. After he had said all that he wanted to say, Sundar Singh said quietly, "I cannot argue with you. But this is my personal experience." Then in a few words he related his personal experience. And those who had come corroborated the Sadhu's words and said that they had known the Sadhu personally and that all that he said was true. The Arya Samaj preacher retired in confusion.

Sundar Singh felt that he was no writer. "I have no taste for writing," he constantly exclaimed. But his impaired health and the numerous letters of encouragement about his books led him to set forth in writing his message. He had just completed another manuscript, entitled *With and Without Christ*.<sup>1</sup> In it he described, with telling personal incidents, what Christ had meant to himself and to a great many others with whom he had come in contact. This moving testimony appealed to a large circle of readers. Sundar Singh wrote his books first in Urdu, and translated them into English with the help of some friend. Both in composition and translation he took great pains to express his meaning.

We also talked often of the controversy which had been raging in India and Europe over him. He always referred to it with a smile as "an interesting controversy". There was no bitterness or ill-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted above, chapters 1 and 2.

feeling towards any of the critics who had been so severe on him. On the other hand, he was convinced that his Roman Catholic critics were led by the desire to exalt their Church and could not face the fact that anyone outside their Church could lead a life like his. He also felt that the Modernists were interested in disproving his claims, as otherwise their view of the supernatural would meet with an effective repudiation. While himself not much concerned about this controversy, he was grateful to Professor Heiler and the numerous friends who had worked for him so nobly.

Miss Annie Marie Petersen, a Danish missionary, visited Sundar Singh at Subathu in 1922 and 1928. From Porto Novo, where she worked, she had to travel six days in crowded third-class railway carriages to reach Subathu. When I visited her at Porto Novo on April 27, 1950, for this purpose, she gave me an account of these visits. As she did not remember clearly which events took place during the first visit and which during the second, I am narrating them all as if in 1928.

She was particularly attracted to Sundar Singh as she found in him the spiritual genius of India blossoming forth at the touch of Christ. She said to me :

“ It was Christmas time and I had gone to see the Sadhu before he left for Tibet for the last time. I found him sitting on the doorstep buying eggs. ‘ ’Tis Christmas, you know,’ he said as though he was explaining the purchase of eggs. Two or three boys whom he was supporting in school had come home for their holidays, and he wanted them to enjoy their Christmas. His relationship with the boys was delightfully informal and friendly. As we sat together for tea, the boys put teaspoons of sugar in the Sadhu’s cup. ‘ These boys know my weakness for sweet things,’ he said with an apologetic smile. . . .

“ During his last years the Roman Catholics were down on the Sadhu, suspecting his sincerity. In one of his letters to me (now lost) he wrote that the Roman Catholics would like to have burnt him, if they could, and added ‘ God bless them ’. . . .

“ He admired Gandhiji for the wonderful way in which he met popularity as well as criticism : Gandhiji was unaffected by either. Sundar Singh said that he was affected too much by popularity. This was the worst ‘ cross ’ he had to bear. He was also inclined to take to heart criticism and hostility. He wished he could be like Gandhiji in his indifference both to popularity and antagonism.

“ I have known Gandhiji well. I have visited him on several occasions and lived in the Ashram with him for many days at a time. Gandhiji is certainly a greater man than Sundar Singh. He believed, for instance, that love or spiritual force could be applied and will prove effective in the most complicated problems of

national life. But there was something wonderful in the blessed presence of Sundar Singh. In his company I felt the spirit of peace and other-worldliness in a way which I did not feel in the presence of Gandhiji.

“When I talked to Sundar Singh, I found that he was rather prejudiced against Gandhiji. He had an impression that Gandhiji did not come out openly as a Christian as he was afraid that his influence in the country would diminish. I did not agree with this point of view. I felt sure that Gandhiji remained a Hindu because he was sincerely convinced of its truth. I was anxious that Sundar Singh should meet Gandhiji and get personally acquainted with him. A visit to Gandhiji’s Ashram was arranged and Sundar Singh spent some time there. When Gandhiji’s autobiography was published later, the Sadhu asked for a copy, which I sent. After reading it he wrote to me that it was a great pity that Gandhiji confessed that he had not yet found God. Sundar Singh said also in his letter that we must continue to pray for him.”

On January 2, 1929, Sundar wrote to the Rev. T. E. Riddle : “I returned here the day before yesterday from Hardwar and Rishikesh. I have had very useful conversation with the Secret Sanyasi Mission’s leaders there.” Sundar Singh’s critics had maintained that the Secret Sanyasi Mission was a hoax, invented by him. It is significant that he continued to believe in its existence to the end of his life.

About February 1929, Sundar Singh passed through Calcutta after a visit to the hill tribes near Nagpur and was staying in the house of a railway officer on the eastern side of that city. S. Kulendran (consecrated in 1947 as the Bishop in Jaffna in the Church of South India) was then a theological student in Serampore College. He and his fellow-students had an interview with the Sadhu. I quote below the account of the interview written at the time by young Kulendran :

“It is said that when Dante passed through the streets of Florence, people would draw back and whisper to one another, ‘That man has been to Hell.’ And few indeed who have seen the strange Indian mystic, who passed through Calcutta the other day and whose name has become so familiar to the world during the last decade, could withhold from him the claim he makes, that he has seen Heaven. Those who read of his visions and raptures, his story of the Maharishi and his miracles, in cold print may shake their heads or smile good humouredly but sceptically. But the cynic’s smile of unbelief would fade when he looks upon the face of the man. And he would begin to feel somewhat ashamed of himself for having had any doubts regarding the sincerity or honesty of such a person.

“ For upon the face of that person there is a look he seldom sees anywhere else. It is the look of one whose eyes have gazed upon the unseen, whose ears have heard things others do not hear—to whom the beating of angels’ wings is as real as the street cries outside. And why indeed should we doubt his claim? The Beatitude cannot admit of two interpretations. ‘ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’ And whoever would challenge the purity of his heart? . . .

“ We had not gone to ask questions, but merely to have the privilege of seeing him and being with him for some time. But emboldened by his kindness and his own suggestion we began to pelt him with questions of various sorts, dealing with different aspects of Christian life and thought, ranging from the usefulness of vegetarian diet as a help in meditation to abstruse questions of theology.

“ Could a Christian take part in politics?—Within limits, he saw no harm. What were the limits?—Some people became so engrossed with politics that religion was dead to them. The late Lala Lajapat Rai had once told him that India could not afford to be busy with religion; she should first win her freedom. That attitude would not do.

“ What did the Sadhuji think should be our attitude towards non-Christian religions?—The old habit of calling them ‘ heathen ’ should go. The worst ‘ heathen ’ were among us. We should love them as brothers, though we need not love all that they believed and did. . . .

“ What did he think about Indianizing Christianity?—There was no need either to Easternize or to Westernize Christianity. We should Christianize it. Our religion very often had no Christ in it. Christianity was Christ Himself. . . .

“ Who were right, the Fundamentalists or the Modernists?—Both were wrong. The Fundamentalists were uncharitable to those who differed from them. That is, they were unchristian. The Modernists sometimes went to the extent of denying the divinity of Christ, which they had no business to do. Did the Sadhu believe in the virgin birth?—He personally had no difficulty, believing as he did that nothing was impossible with God. Some people, however, held that Christ’s divinity lay in His life and not in His birth. But after all it was not a person’s theological opinion that mattered but his life.

“ Did he think there was eternal punishment?—There was punishment, but it was not eternal. The actual Greek word used about it in the New Testament frequently meant ‘ lasting for ages’. Everyone after this life would be given a fair chance of making good, and attaining to the measure of fullness his soul was capable of. This might sometimes take ages.



“Did he think vegetarian diet was conducive to a religious life?—It was conducive to good health. Was fasting good for the purpose?—It was good in the case of some and bad in the case of others. Some found it difficult to pray on an empty stomach. . . .

“Would India ever become entirely Christian?—A nominal acceptance of Christianity was of no use. Western countries were by no means better off than India, because nominally they were entirely Christian. . . .

“Asked about Prayer, the Sadhu said it was the opening of the windows of the soul to let God come in. At first this would be difficult. Psychologists said that our greatest and favourite idea subdued all other ideas. ‘Make this sense of the presence of God your greatest idea. Try it early in the morning every day. . . . When for a long time my eyes were giving me trouble, I did not care because within my heart there was a great peace. . . . Many nowadays have no time, are too tired, to pray. Personally I feel tired and weary if I have not prayed and meditated in the presence of God.’

“The above is only a summary and can by no means reproduce the atmosphere in which we listened to the actual words, with ‘the aroma of the unseen’ clinging around us. As we struggled back through the small alleys into the din and traffic of Calcutta, the spell of that peace and quiet assurance was still upon us and a feeling that the lips that spoke that day had indeed drunk of the waters that make glad the city of God.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1924 the National Missionary Society of India had invited Sundar Singh to co-operate with them in the evangelization of Tibet. He felt that he could not join the N.M.S. but expressed his willingness to select two suitable workers who would go with him to Tibet every year and preach the Gospel there, and the Society agreed to pay the salaries of these two workers. In 1927 the National Missionary Society reported that some of its work was in Tibet and the Himalayan States under the direction of Sadhu Sundar Singh.

Sundar Singh wrote to Mr. Riddle on April 18, 1929 :

“I’m leaving today for Tibet, fully aware of the dangers and difficulties of the journey, but I must do my best to do my duty. I set no value on my own life as compared with the joy of finishing my course and fulfilling the commission I received from the Lord Jesus to attest the Gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20 : 24). I wanted to come to see you before leaving for Tibet, but I have received a letter from a trader to meet him at once on our way to

<sup>1</sup> *The National Missionary Intelligencer*, May 1929.

Tibet. The route will be the same as that about which I told you last year. I hope to be back with one or two Tibetan Christians by the end of June. If anything happens I will send down Thapa to meet you, and if you do not hear anything from me, or about me, then please come to Subathu in July in order to see to all my things in my house here."<sup>1</sup>

Riddle adds : " When he last spoke to me of his great desire to see the little group of Christians at Rasar to the east of Lake Manasarowar, he became very greatly excited. He was convinced that he would not come back again, and as he spoke, the thought of the Great Adventure so laid hold on him that he trembled with emotion as he visualized, not death, of which he had no fear, but another such frightful experience as he had already had in the well there."<sup>2</sup>

Mr. G. H. Watson, Superintendent of the Leper Asylum, Subathu, sent out on September 3, 1929 a circular letter to all Sundar's friends in which he said :

" On April 18th Sadhu Sundar Singh called in to bid me Fare well as he was just starting off on his tour to Tibet. Last year he left us with that in view, but after tramping forty miles from Rishikesh (at the foot of the Himalayas, beside the Ganges River) along the mountain path, he was taken suddenly ill with hemorrhage, and was brought back to the rail head by his Tibetan fellow-travellers. From there he was able to return alone to Subathu, where he recovered his health. So once again this year he left us to join Tibetan traders with whom he had corresponded, and go with them to their land hemmed in with snow-clad mountains.

" Their way was first of all to be along the well-trodden pilgrim route to the Hindu shrine at Badrinath. The Sadhu told me they expected to divert from that road before reaching Badrinath, as their path would go to the east up to the Niti Pass into Tibet, and then he would return (D.V.) the same way to reach Subathu before the end of June. Meanwhile he would be out of reach of the post, and so he asked me to receive his correspondence and reply to necessary letters.

" The time passed for his return and no news came through from the Sadhu or any one at all. He promised to send messengers in case of his illness if possible. He left instructions about his will which his two executors were to carry out if he did not return. But one—Mr. Riddle of the New Zealand Presbyterian Mission—felt that some attempt to trace our brother should be made; so with Dr. Taylor of Roorkee he spent twenty-eight days hard travelling to within four miles of Tibet up to an altitude of 18,000 feet, in search

<sup>1</sup> T. E. Riddle, *Vision and Call*, pp. 62, 63.

<sup>2</sup> p. 63.

of the Sadhu. They could not find any trace of him at all. No one seems to have seen or heard of him on the whole route. It is very sadly strange to have such a negative result. Government officials are also hunting through the pilgrim registers to see if they can trace his death there.

“ I felt that his friends whose letters have reached me since his departure would like a few lines, and as I cannot easily write to each one individually, I am sending this letter to all whose addresses were given. His last and, in my opinion, his best book, published only this year, viz. *With and Without Christ*, enables us to believe that if he has come to the end of his earthly journey he is now realizing the ‘ Living Presence of Christ ’ more fully than ever before. In the Epistle to the Philippians we read of Paul ‘ having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is FAR BETTER ’ ; hence we can but thank God for the joyful state of our brother Sadhu Sundar Singh, and look forward to the happy reunion in the Lord’s presence also.

“ It would be the Sadhu’s fortieth birthday today, and some friends had written him for this day. ”

It has not been possible all these years to find out what really happened to Sundar Singh. He might have had one of his heart attacks and died from heart failure. He might have been swept away by an epidemic of cholera or some other dread disease. He might have fallen down a precipice and perished. Or he might have died the death of a martyr for preaching the Gospel in a closed country. To die such a death was his greatest ambition.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See. T. E. Riddle, *Vision and Call*, pp. 63-72, for a stirring account of the adventures of the search party (T. E. Riddle and John Taylor).

Read C. F. Andrews, *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, pp. 202-230, for another answer to the question “ Is he dead ? ”

## INDEX A. SUBJECTS

- ARYA SAMAJ**, 86, 109, 213  
**BAPTISM**, Sundar Singh's views on, 22, 86, 87, 94, 117, 127  
**Bible**, Sundar Singh's view of the, 21-23, 33, 71, 90, 122, 147  
**Buddhism**, 109, 115-116  
**CASTE**, problem of, 101  
**Children**, Sundar Singh's love of, 167, 172  
**Christ**, *see* Jesus Christ  
**Christo Samaj**, 92  
**Church**, the, and denominational divisions, Sundar Singh's attitude to, 27, 35, 86, 94, 125 ff., 131, 138, 143-147  
**Converts of Sundar Singh**, 18-25, 34, 94  
**Cowley Fathers**, 6, 84, 88, 120, 135  
**Criticism of Sundar Singh**, 11 f., 34, 152, 181 f., 189, 203-8, 224, 227, 229, 236  
**EDUCATION** and book-reading, Sundar Singh's attitude to, 34, 97, 175, 210  
**FAST**, Sundar Singh's, 49-56  
**Fundamentalism**, 216  
**HEALING**, spiritual, 97-100  
**Hinduism**, 16, 94, 167-168, 172, 206, 214  
**INDIAN** expression of Christianity, 126, 132-133, 172, 184, 216  
**Intercommunion**, Sundar Singh's insistence on freedom for, 35, 125, 147  
**JESUS CHRIST**, Sundar Singh's devotion to, 20, 24, 86, 109, 123, 160  
**Jesus Christ**, visions of, 19, 147-148, 156, 184, 193, 194  
 — Second Coming of, 33, 45  
**LAMAS**, Tibetan, 40, 47, 77, 114, 151  
**MARRIAGE**, Sundar Singh's refusal of, 69 f.  
**Miracles**, Sundar Singh's belief in, 10, 23, 33, 41, 45-48, 81, 135, 143, 156, 169, 176  
**Missionaries**, foreign, Sundar Singh's attitude to, 122, 143, 174  
**Modernism**, Sundar Singh's dislike of, 10, 73, 186, 205, 216  
**Money**, clothes, and food, Sundar Singh's attitude to, 20, 51-52, 69, 96, 115, 177, 212  
**Mysticism**, in Sundar Singh, 97, 132-133, 146, 162, 171  
**NATURE**, Sundar Singh's view of, in relation to God and Pantheism, 65, 103, 144-145, 155, 178  
**POLITICS**, participation in, 216  
**Prayer**, the mainspring of Sundar Singh's life, 36, 62, 89, 99, 119, 136, 141-152, 161  
**Psychical Research**, and Sundar Singh, 198-201  
**REINCARNATION** of souls, 197  
**Roman Catholic** attacks on Sundar Singh, 10, 54, 165, 188, 203 f., 214  
 — defence of Sundar Singh, 190  
**SACRAMENTS**, Sundar Singh's attitude to, 35, 85, 127, 147  
**Sadhus**, Christian, 44, 67  
 — secret society of, 80-83, 86, 93-104, 215

- Salvation of non-Christians, 124  
 Science, Natural, Sundar Singh's  
   view of, 122, 178  
 Sikhs, 16, 21, 106, 178  
 Spiritualism, 196-201
- THEOSOPHY, 122, 134
- Translations of Sundar Singh's  
   books: Danish, 206; French,  
   9, 130; German, 12, 182
- Trust Fund, founded by Sundar  
 Singh, 8, 190
- VISIONS and ecstasies of Sundar  
 Singh, 10, 41, 51, 60 f., 82, 137,  
 145-150, 171, 181, 184 f., 192-201,  
 215
- WESTERN Christianity, Sundar  
 Singh's criticisms of, 136-138,  
 162 f.
- Women, their place in the Church,  
 160
- YOGA, 18, 97, 126, 149, 172

## INDEX B. CHIEF PERSONS MENTIONED

- ALI, T. Nasib,** 39  
**Andrews, Rev. C. F.,** 10, 28, 31, 35, 81, 203, 219  
**Angus, Rev. C. F.,** 122  
**Appasamy, Bishop A. J.,** 6-10, 51, 95, 125, 137, 146, 149, 157, 159, 162, 169, 174, 178, 208 f.  
**Appasamy, Dewan Bahadur A. S.,** 95  
**Appasamy. Kirubai,** 106  
  
**BARNÉ, Bishop, G.,** 192, 205  
**Bergson, H.,** 176 f.  
**Bernadotte, Count,** 209  
**Bhansi Lal, Dr.,** 68 f.  
**Boehme,** 210  
**Buchman, Dr. F. N. D.,** 134, 138  
  
**CAMPBELL, F. J. and Miss M. J.,** 137  
**Champion, Rev. A.,** 106  
**Chandu Lal, Rev.,** 191  
**Chauhan, Bishop J. W.,** 20-23  
**Chenchiah, P.,** 61, 93, 109  
**Cowley Fathers, see** Index A  
  
**DAVID, Vincent S.,** 8 f., 85, 87  
**Davidson, Archbishop R.,** 124, 128 f.  
**Deane, Rev. J. H.,** 140  
**Dharmajit Singh, Rev. Y.,** 50, 55  
**Dobson, Miss Mary,** 112, 118  
**Duraiswamy, S. J.,** 11  
**Durrant, Bishop H. B.,** 195  
  
**FEIERABEND, Dr. H. A.,** 185  
**Fife, Dr. E. E.,** 23, 24, 81, 187, 208  
**Francis, St. (of Assisi),** 11, 27 f., 54, 123, 131 f., 139, 181, 190  
**Fraser, Miss C.,** 139 f.  
**Frimødt, E. H.,** 206  
  
**GABLER, Rev. P.,** 11, 20, 48, 55, 113, 186  
**Gandhi, Mahatma,** 41, 153, 189, 214  
  
**Ganguly, J. N. C.,** 119  
**Geismar, Prof. E.,** 206  
**Goddard, Pastor,** 8, 82, 195 f.  
**Goodwin, Miss (typist),** 9, 155  
**Graham, Rev. R.,** 61  
  
**HALLIWELL, Rev. H.,** 131 f.  
**Harris, Dr. Rendel,** 118  
**Heiler, Prof. F.,** 10-12, 24, 38, 50, 60, 98, 127, 132, 166, 167, 170, 180, 186, 188-191, 203, 209  
**Hosten, Fr., S.J.,** 10, 185  
**Hoyland, J. W.,** 119  
  
**JAMES, Rev. A.,** 141  
**Jesus Christ, see** Index A  
**Jones, Dr. Stanley,** 50, 55, 199, 205  
**Jowett, Dr. J. H.,** 125, 131  
**Judson, A. S.,** 74  
  
**KANAI, Rev. T.,** 107  
**Kartar Singh,** 41-43, 79  
**Kausech, Dr.,** 166 f.  
**Kiener, Pastor,** 132  
**Kulendran, Bishop S.,** 215 ff.  
**Kunick, Rev. N.,** 41  
  
**LAUTERBURG, Pastor,** 156, 161  
**Lazarus, Fr. (Orthodox),** 13  
**Lefroy, Bishop J. J.,** 34 f., 53, 63  
**Luther, Martin,** 121, 161  
  
**MACKENZIE, Dr. W. D.,** 134  
**Maharishi, The Christian Sadhu of Kailash,** 45-46, 65-83, 94, 106, 158, 186 f., 215  
**Martyn, Fr. G. Y.,** 62, 68  
**Mather, Rev. J.,** 99  
**Mohan Lal,** 74  
  
**NEWTON, Rev. E. P.,** 21  
**Nicholson, Fr. H. S.,** 86  
**Nygren, Bishop A.,** 172  
  
**OLDHAM, Dr. J. H.,** 129

- PAKENHAM-WALSH, Bishop H., 200  
 Parker, Mrs., 7, 47, 100, 125, 138,  
 146, 154, 180, 185, 204  
 Paul, K. T., 107  
 Peoples, Dr. J. W., 178, 202, 209  
 Petersen, Miss A. M., 214  
 Pfister, Dr. O., 10, 48, 159, 186, 206  
 Playne, Fr. F. S., 84  
 Pohl, Pastor, J., 164  
 Popley, Rev. H. A., 12, 101-106, 108 f.,  
 177, 182
- QUDRAT Masih, 74, 78
- READ, Miss D., 140  
 Redman, Rev. J., 24, 53, 60  
 Riddle, Rev. T. E., 10, 44, 55 f., 61  
 81, 188-194, 202, 205, 215-219  
 Rudra, S. K., 29, 30  
 Russia, Empress of, 173
- SANDYS, Canon, E. J., 53 f.  
 Sher Singh, 16, 23, 26, 117, 177  
 Shoran Singh, 30
- Soderblom, Archbishop, 9, 170-173,  
 188, 209  
 Stokes, S. E., 26, 62, 67, 99, 203  
 Streeter, B. H., 7, 51, 137, 146, 157,  
 162, 185, 210  
 Swedenborg, 171 f., 192-199  
 Sybilla, Sister, 84
- TAGORE, Rabindranath, 82, 103,  
 131, 134, 189
- UMEMORI, Rev., G., 107  
 Uppal, Rev. P. C., 22, 187
- VON HÜGEL, Baron F., 8, 125
- WESTERN, Bishop F. J., 27, 68  
 Wherry, Dr. E. M., 37, 53, 117, 189  
 Wigram, Canon E. F. E., 35, 53 f.  
 Wilhelmina, Queen (Holland), 7  
 Wood, H. G., 120
- YUNAS Singh, 75, 82, 111
- ZAHIR, A., 7, 62-64, 146

## INDEX C. CHIEF BOOKS MENTIONED

### (a) BOOKS, ETC., WRITTEN BY SUNDAR SINGH :

1. Letters in *Nur Afshan*, 9, 40 ff., 47, 61 ff., 75 ff., 82 ff.
2. *A Collection of Incidents*, 28, 42, 45, 47, 68
3. *At the Master's Feet*, 9, 182
4. *Reality and Religion*, 9, 195
5. *The Search for Reality*, 200 f.
6. *Meditations on the Spiritual Life*, 9
7. *Visions of the Spiritual World*, 9, 90, 199.
8. *With and Without Christ*, 9, 19 f., 22, 212 f., 28, 235, 241

All these were written in Urdu and translated into English.

### (b) BOOKS, ETC., WRITTEN ABOUT SUNDAR SINGH :

1. Andrews, C. F., *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, 11, 32 f., 38, 241
2. Gabler, P., *Sadhu Sundar Singh* (German), 12, 22, 36, 47, 52, 60, 65 f., 70, 82, 124, 205
- 3-6. Heiler, F.,
  - (i) in German : *Apostel oder Betruger ?* 12, 41, 183, 204  
*Sadhu Sundar Singh. Apostel des Ostens und Westens*, 12, 198  
*Die Wahrheit Sundar Singhs*, 12, 23, 26, 54 f., 66, 82, 90, 108, 183, 205
  - (ii) in English : *The Gospel of Sundar Singh*, 26, 145, 198
7. Parker, Rebecca, *Sadhu Sundar Singh : Called of God*, 8, 51, 110 f., 137, 152, 160, 198, 203, 224
8. Pfister, O., *Die Legende Sundar Singhs* (German), 11, 52, 175, 204
9. Riddle, T. E., *Vision and Call*, 11, 239 f.,
10. G. Secretan, *Par Christ et Pour Christ* (French), 10, 170 f., 175 f.



- 11 and 12. Soderblom, N., *Sundar Singhs Budskap* (Swedish), 1, 188  
*Tre Livsformer* (Swedish), 11, 187
13. Streeter, B. H., and Appasamy A. J., *The Sadhu* (in U.S.A., *The Message of Sadhu Sundar Singh*), 8, 56, 116, 132, 142, 150, 160, 168, 172, 178, 189 ff., 198, 203, 232
14. Van Berchem, Mlle. A., *Un Temoin du Christ* (French), 10
15. Zahir, A., small books in English, 8, 10, 70 *Shaida-i-Salib* (in Urdu), 70

## ARTICLES ON SUNDAR SINGH

- in *The Christian Patriot*, 7, 102 f., 115 f., 121 f., 156 f.  
 „ *The International Review of Missions*, 187  
 „ *The United Church Review*, 11, 61, 66 f., 206, 212  
 „ *N.M.S. Intelligencer*, 13, 66, 167, 239  
 „ *The Church Times*, 135
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