



The Vision

and

the Call

The life of Sadhu Sundar Singh

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Table of Content

The Sadhu's Background	1
By Vision to Peace	4
The Loss of all Things	7
His Renunciation.....	9
The Sadhu Way.....	12
Tibet.....	15
Secret Disciples.....	17
The Fast and the Second Vision.....	19
What Followed from the Second Vision.....	21
Peace:	21
Persecution:.....	21
Spiritual vision:	22
At God's Call	25
His Call to South India:	25
His Call to the East:.....	27
His Call to English Speaking Lands:.....	28
His Call to Europe:	29
His Call to Write:.....	31
From the Sadhu's Mail.....	33
The Last Journey.....	35
The Sadhu we Knew	40
About the Author	44

The Sadhu's Background

In the hot weather of 1912, I spent some months in a little town in one of the Hill States that lie between Simla and the Punjab plains. I had only recently arrived in 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 cotton wrap, and in his hand a small dumpy edition of the New Testament in Urdu.

They introduced him to me with a great respect as Sundar Singh. They were thrilled at having him there to address their 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 many intimate contacts that I had with him in the following years, I never had cause to change that first impression of his sincerity, truth and humbleness, and of the power of his pleasing personality.

As the years went by, he grew in world experience and spiritual power, but he always retained his humbleness and the simple sincerity of his faith.

A friendship began then that remained constant throughout the last seventeen years of his life, and is a memory that I greatly value. In April 1929 he wrote to me: 'I am leaving today for Tibet fully aware of the dangers and difficulties of the journey, but I must try my best to do my duty.' He left that day and that was the last that anyone ever heard of him.

The years since then have been so overlaid with war and post-war anxieties that much that the world-Church knew of him has passed beyond the borders of easy remembering. With me the memory of Sadhu's personality and character is still fresh, and I count it a privilege to give this account of his life, so that the Church, may learn how through the age-old way of renunciation, *bhakti* (devotion) and meditation he arrived at a real sense of the near presence of the Living Lord, and found abiding peace in Him.

The story of Sadhu Sundar Singh begins at Rampur, a typical Punjab village of mud houses built on the bank of the Sirhind Canal not far from the railway that goes to Ludhiana and the North west.

India is a land of villages. It is part of an immense alluvial plain that stretches eastwards to the Burma border, a distance from east to west of two thousand seven hundred miles. In the Punjab section of this plain the villagers are all of the same type. To present a defensive front in his world that always had in it possibilities of attack by dacoit robber bands, and in which the memory of marauding armies is still green, the Punjabi has learned to huddle his houses together so that flat roof joins to flat roof to provide a way of internal communication by which he can quickly reach any part of his village threatened by attack. The only materials available for the construction of their houses are mud and wooden beams. Unburnt brick is used for the ordinary houses, but for the few better-class homes locally burnt bricks are available. Beams support the flat mud roofs of both qualities of houses. In

nearly all the bigger houses there is an open courtyard on to which the houses of the various members of the family open.

The Punjab soil is good, and the Sikh peasant farmer cultivates it well for his sowings. Using the primitive wooden plough drawn by a pair of bullocks he will plough and re-plough his field many times before he puts in his wheat. Millet, cotton, maize, sugar-cane and rice are grown in the steaming hot weather of the rains, while wheat, mustard and barley are the main crops grown during the cold weather.

It is held, that the Jat Sikhs, the stock from which Sundar Singh came, have characteristics that identify them with some of the mixture of race that began in the Punjab in 319 B.C. when Alexander the Great led his armies into India as far as the Jehlum River. That influence continued through the following four hundred years when Greek satraps ruled the Punjab. It is undoubtedly true that the Jat Sikhs have facial features that seem allied with the Greeks, and they are thrifty and progressive above their neighbours. They keep their houses, implements and bullock carts in good repair, and take great care of their draught oxen, cows and buffaloes. They are sturdy people, and they need to be tough to stand up to the extreme burning heat of the hot weather and the piercing cold of the winter.

The people of the district in which Rampur village is situated are predominantly Sikhs and of the Jat caste, but up till Partition in 1947, with its forcible evictions of minorities of other religions, many villages of the Mohammedans were found there, and between the two there was always hostility.

Sikh means learner, or disciple. The founder of the sect was Guru Nanak who lived near Lahore in the fifteenth century, and he was followed by nine other Gurus or leaders. They are one of orthodox Hinduism's breakaway sects. They deny idolatry and most of the rites of the Hindu religion, and seek a purer form of worship along the lines of *bhakti* or devotion to God. In theory, they have no caste but in practice they are by no means free from it.

When Guru Govind Singh, the tenth guru, was dying he was asked whom he would name as his successor. He placed his hand on the Granth, and said: 'This is your Guru.' The reverence which the Sikhs hold for their book is deeper than the idol-worshipper's reverence for his idol. The weight and size of the Book must remain constant, but its words are the Voice of God speaking to them. The character in which it is written is called *Gurmukhi*, the Face of God. Their places of worship are called *Gurdwaras*, Doors of God. In its attitude of devotion the Sikh worship approaches nearer to the Christian attitude than any other Indian religion does.

In the first half of their history the Sikhs remained a reformed religious sect taken up with seeking to realize God and to find the rapture of His presence, but increasing antagonism from the Mohammedan rulers forced them to become more militant in their organization. In the long strife with Islam two of their Gurus suffered martyrdom, namely the fifth Guru Arjan and the ninth Guru Teg Bahadur. His son, Guru Govind Singh, formed his followers into the *Kalsa*, the Pure Ones, a semi military body whose members wear as a kind of uniform five distinctive badges — the uncut hair, the comb, the iron bangle, the shorts or drawers and the sword.

The district round Rampur is full of tragic tradition for the Sikhs. North of it is the place where Guru Govind Singh was attacked by Mohammedans at the instigation of the hill rajas. A few days later two of the Guru's young sons were killed in another clash, and two still smaller sons were betrayed by a Brahmin servant to the Mohammedans who built them alive into a wall. Guru Govind Singh fled to Nander (Nanded) in Hyderabad, but his lieutenant, Banda Bahadur, returned the following year and took a fearful vengeance on all the Mohammedans in that area of the Punjab. A stretch of fifty miles is

dotted with the sites of razed villages, and over miles of fields the ruins of imposing buildings show where important towns once stood.

The bitter resentments of these earlier atrocities lingered on through the British rule, and when in 1947 India was transferred to Indian rulers and a separate Muslim state was created in East Punjab, the old hatred boiled up. On both sides of the new border orgies of murder, arson, abduction of women and looting at once began. Four million Mohammedans were driven to West Punjab, and four million Hindus and Sikhs were harried to East Punjab in the most violent two-way transfer of population ever known in history. In the double drive over a million lives were lost.

By Vision to Peace

The strength of British rule had kept this kind of explosion from erupting but hostility and hate were always below the surface. It was into this below-the-surface hate that Sundar Singh was born in 1889. Sher Singh, his father, was a fairly well-to-do landowner. His house and houses belonging to his uncles and brothers opened on to a common courtyard in which all lived as a single family in such intimacy that the children, in sorting out relationships, invariably called their father, 'Uncle.'

Sundar Singh always remembered his mother with tender affection. She was a deeply religious woman, who was a Sikh in the outward form of her religion but was at heart devoted to many of the beliefs and practices of Hinduism. When Sundar was born the family followed the usual Sikh practice in selecting a name. The sacred 'Grant Sahib' is opened at random and the first letter of the first word in the upper left hand verse of the left hand page is taken. The name to be given has to begin with this letter.

In this case 'S' was the initial letter, and the name of Sundar, or Beautiful, was chosen. Singh, a lion, is the name taken by all Sikhs who follow Guru Govind Singh. Together with the Five Signs worn by them, this name showed that they belonged to the *Khalsa*, or Pure Ones, as the militant organization of the last guru is called.

When he was seven or eight his mother arranged for a Brahmin pundit to come to the house to teach him some Sanskrit, and to initiate him into the teaching and requirements of Hindu *dharm*, or religious duty. A Sikh granthi, a reader of the sacred Granth, also came to teach him *Gurmukhi*, the Punjabi script in which the Granth is written, and to give him instruction in their way of worship and devotion.

The boy had a quick enquiring mind and assailed his teachers with questions about the 'why' of their statements. These were not always easy to answer and to put him off they tried to find refuge in saying: 'Wait till you're older, and you will understand the meaning of these things.'

This failure to face up to his difficulties left him with his questionings unsolved, and, as the years went by, other of a more demanding nature were added and created in him a state of acute spiritual unrest.

Rampur was not infrequently visited by preachers of the American Presbyterian Mission who worked in that area. In later years the Sadhu told me of the great respect he had for one of them, Kirpa Masih, who, he said, had no great education, and never had more than fifteen rupees a month but whose character and faithfulness had very greatly helped him.

In those days the Mission opened a small primary school in Rampur and Sundar was sent there. At this school, in addition to the subjects taught to meet the requirements of the State Education Code, all the boys had to take the scripture lesson and learn Bible passages. All Sundar's Sikh pride rebelled at what he considered the indignity of having to learn from the Book of the despised Christian outcasts.

To show how much he despised the Christians' Bible he one day tore up a portion. When his father heard that, he rebuked him for having shown disrespect for a book which was the Word of God for the Christians. In all his after life Sundar Singh looked back with ashamed regret at that violent and rebellious action. Long after, when asked for his blessing by some worshipful admirer, he would decline, saying: 'How can these hands that have torn up God's Holy Book be used in blessing?'

To the ferment at work in the already questioning mind of the boy there were now added the claims made by Jesus to the lordship of all life, and a struggle began which tore into the depths of his soul, giving him no peace, and left him soul-hungry and unsatisfied. About this time his beloved mother and an elder brother both died, and the loss of these loved ones still further increased his questionings and spiritual unrest.

When he was fourteen his unrest of spirit had come so near to the limit of his enduring that suicide seemed an easy way out for him, but before taking that step he decided that he would put a last plea to God to reveal Himself and thus end his dark night of doubt.

Sikhs and Hindus, in the search for merit or for enlightenment, bathe in cold water before beginning their worship, so at three o'clock in the bitter cold of Punjab winter morning Sundar bathed, and then began to pray that God would reveal Himself and end his spiritual conflicts. His petition was that the all-pervading, impersonal, unknowable, incomprehensible universal spirit, that is the supreme deity of popular Hindu belief would once again take human form so that his mind might be able to compass the thought of him. Orthodox Hindus held that the deity had already taken finite form three hundred and thirty-three million times to destroy some evil-doer or to proclaim some truth. In the most influential of all the sacred books of popular Hinduism, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Supreme Spirit in the form of Krishna had said:

'To save the righteous, to destroy evil-doers, to establish the Law, I come into birth age after age.' — and all Hinduism expected such incarnations to occur. In the Punjab villages it is not rare for the arrogant pride of a sectarian leader or the fulsome flattery of his designing disciples to claim that he is God.

I once attended a conference of the members of one of the Hindu sects held in a village at no great distance from Rampur. Challengingly one speaker asserted: 'Do not say that our leader comes from God. He is God.' In the same district I saw the followers of a Jat, who claimed to be God, worshipping him as God.

That night the boy, Sundar Singh, looked for the appearing of some *avatar*, or incarnation of God, who would destroy the demon of his doubts. As he prayed he became conscious that a light was shining in the room. The light continued and gradually took the form of a globe of fire and in it he saw the face of Jesus. Amazed that the appearance had taken this unexpected form, he was yet convinced that that there was the answer to his prayers and that it was in Jesus that God was revealing Himself. He threw himself on the floor and acknowledged Him as God, and at once peace flooded in to his troubled heart. The weary conflict was over. Never again was he to doubt that God was in Christ revealing Himself. In the power of that vision he went out into a world hostile to any change from ancestral religion, and endured because he had seen the Lord, and was forever convinced that in Him he had found God.

In cases of the conversion of high caste Hindus an experience of a vision accompanied with light-forms is frequently present. The spiritual struggle is so severe, the uprooting of inherited ideas so cataclysmic, that some picture previously seen, or some words brooded over, suddenly appear in the form of flaming fire, or of burning letters that come to the struggler as an unquestionable sign from God. Such a vision fully convinces the seeker, and with it his soul finds rest.

It was so with Paul on the way to Damascus. Impressed by the claims that Jesus was Messiah and Lord, the struggle to repudiate his high caste as a Pharisee and to become a follower of a crucified impostor worked up to the crisis, when, in a flash of blinding light, he heard commanding words that he ever afterwards spoke of as his meeting with the Lord, who commissioned him to be the Apostle to the Gentiles.

The Loss of all Things

Excited by his experience of a vision and of the peace that followed, he roused his father as day began to break and told him that because of what had happened to him, Jesus was now his *Guru* (Spiritual Leader) whom he must follow, but his father only said: 'Silly boy! Go back to your bed and sleep. You've been dreaming.' When the family learned of it they treated it as a great joke. It was unthinkable to them that a proud Jat Sikh should leave the religion of their Gurus to become a despised outcaste. But as the days passed and neither ridicule nor mockery moved him they began to be alarmed lest he should indeed bring their honour into the dust by adhering to this mad fancy that had taken him.

Fifty years ago, Christians in the Punjab were weak and despised. The only Christians of whom the Sikh villagers had knowledge came from the outcaste group, whom they knew as their *kames*, their very low farm hands and village sweepers.

Among Hindus and Sikhs external observance is an essential part of their worship. By bathing they gain not only cleanness of body but are prepared in spirit for their worship. Before eating they are scrupulous in washing from their hands any touch that may have been defiling.

They inherited from their pastoral ancestors a deep veneration for their cattle. The cow provided them with daily food, the bullock with power for transport and ploughing. Naturally and gladly they joined in the veneration of the cow. Crashing into these ways came the Christians of the West with a different way of life and little thought of how it reacted to Indian religious feelings. They were not influenced by the Hindu bogey of 'touch', the dreaded contact with one of lower caste that would make their person and food ceremonially impure. Bitter resentment boiled up in them at the cow killing practised by Christians and Mohammedans, while they viewed with revulsion and horror the eating of beef which was customary among Europeans. They felt that it put Christians in the same class as the outcastes.

The local Christians about Rampur all came from the despised *kamin* outcastes. They, or their relatives, did all the filthy cleaning up of the village. They were unclean in their personal habits. They ate scraps of food left over from the houses in which they swept. It was widely believed that all Christians lived on the same level and were at heart equally debased and filthy. To become Christian was for them the same as to become an outcaste.

The glory of the vision that Sundar Singh had seen had kindled a fire of faith in him. Christ, who was the Revealer of God, was alive. He felt His continued Presence with him, and that gave him a peace that had in it a touch of the ecstasy that Sikh *bhakti* worshippers found in repeating the Name. As he continued in his new faith his family became alarmed. They pleaded with him not to disgrace them. They poured ridicule on him, then changed it to reviling and abuse and then to petty persecution. All the castes in Rampur village, were united in deriding him.

His relations promised him wealth and position if he would change, and once, when he had gone to visit a relative in the Sikh State of Nabha, the *maharajah* (ruling prince) called him into his presence. At first he spoke persuasively to him, but when he made no progress he reviled him as a coward jackal that had ceased to be a lion, '*singh*.'

For about eight months the bitterness of his persecutions assailed the lonely boy but did not shake him. Then as a public intimation that his faith in the Sikh religion was gone, he cut off his long hair. Of the Five Signs of the Sikhs the one that is their chief glory is the *Kes*, the uncut hair which they wear tied in a bob at the top of the head, and the beard often worn in rolls from chin to ear. It never ceases to be a nuisance to men working in conditions of Punjab dust and heat, but when dressed it adds inches to their dignity and they are extremely proud of it.

There was a finality in Sundar's action. He could no longer continue in his home for before all men he had shown that he was no longer a Sikh, and so his enraged family ill-treated him. To them he was an outcaste. He was made to sleep under a veranda. Food was given to him there as if he were an untouchable, and the following morning they turned him out from his home. He was dead to them.

The outcasting of a man is a terrible instrument of caste discipline. It is commonly spoken of as the forbidding of the pipe and water. No one among his caste-equals can then smoke or have social intercourse with him, and no one can give him a drink of water from their vessels. Sikhs who abhor smoking have their own methods of applying social ostracism. Inevitably he is forced into association with lower castes, and can only get back to his former caste by paying the crushing price that the Brahmins demand for performing the purificatory rites for his return.

Sundar was now out of caste and driven from his home with nowhere to turn for help. As he went out one of the women of the home gave him some food to take with him. He afterwards said that it was his sister-in-law who gave it. Going out he did not know what road to take, but kept up on the canal bank. Thirty-five miles up at the head works of the canal was Rugar, where a few of the Christians driven out from Rampur had found home. The pastor there had been a high caste Hindu who for Christ's sake had himself been driven out from home and caste. Sundar set off in that direction and finally arrived there. On the way he had eaten of the food from his home, but it had poison mixed into it. Soon after his arrival the poison took effect, and he had violent spasms of pain. Through the night the pastor's wife attended to him. The dispenser from the hospital was called, but was of the opinion that there was no hope. By that time he was bleeding at nose and mouth, but during the night he felt that God's healing hand had been laid on him and the pains at once subsided. In the morning the dispenser could scarcely believe his eyes when he found him sitting out in the sun weak and shaken but free from pain.

His Renunciation

Shortly after this, arrangements were made for him to attend the Christian High School at Ludhiana and he stayed there for a few months. Once or twice attempts were made to abduct him forcibly, and once police protection was requested to restrain a mob of hooligans who came to the mission compound to carry him off by force. The low standard of Christian living of the boys in the hostel was a great disappointment to him. While he was in this state of disillusionment his father, thin and hollow-eyed with grief, came to him to make a last plea. He embraced the boy and talked to him of his mother and home and of his own love. He begged him to come back. Sundar was almost overwhelmed with the desire to return, but in that hour he remembered the vision and the peace that had come with it, and he was able to tell his father that he could never again return to the Sikh religion.

In the hot weather holidays he was sent to the hills at Subathu, and on his sixteenth birthday, on 3rd September 1905, he was baptised in Simla. Nine months had passed since his vision. They had been months of suffering and anguish of heart. His home ties had been broken and he had been thrown among people whom he had been taught to despise. He longed for his home, but dominating all natural feelings was the vision and peace of heart that came when he yielded himself to Jesus as God.



Simla around 1900

At his baptism an intense joy came to him and wiped out the memory of his sufferings. He felt he now belonged to Christ — a new creature purified for His use. He said of that experience: ‘The whole universe was like a great ocean of joy. I felt myself drowning in sweetness.’

After his baptism he returned to Subathu. There in the quiet of the pine woods he spent much time in prayer for guidance and in meditating on the implications of the new life into which he had entered. In those days the advice of his dead mother came back to him: 'Don't be careless like your brothers. Devote yourself to the religious life as a sadhu.' In her Hindu way of life, this pious village mother had made it her practice to attend to the needs of wandering sadhus and to listen to any that had words of wisdom and spiritual value to impart.

One of the milestones in the development of Indian philosophy was the doctrine of *karma*, which said that all actions carry their own reward or punishment. At the end of every life balance is struck between the good and bad deeds done in a life period, and the place in the next birth in which a man's soul will start is that for which that balance qualifies him.

The soul in its transmigrations has to pass through hundreds of thousands of rebirths. In each of them a man will have an all-out struggle to get together enough merit from his deeds to secure a bit of a rise next time. The thought of the aeon-long struggle ahead appals the seeker with its hopelessness and heartlessness and has created the pessimism that colours all Hindu thought.

Escape theories have been many, and all involve renunciation of actions, for in them good or evil is inherent. Salvation to the Hindu is 'Release' — being made free from the burden of further birth and rebirth.

In the last of the four periods into which they divide earthly life, the Hindu is supposed to renounce family and worldly occupations and go to live in the jungle that there, free from the entanglements of actions, he may give himself to meditation in the order that he may better realise that he is one with the Universal Spirit. When he can say: 'I am *Brahman* (God)' all his wrong ideas about his personality being other than God's will clear away, and he will merge into the world-soul and become one with Him as a drop of water does when it falls into the ocean.

A more violent breaking away from the life of action in which lies evil is *sanyas*. The *sanyasi*, the renouncer, is one who at an earlier stage in life realises his identity with *Brahman*, the ultimate spirit, and is thereby freed from the fruits of action. Not wanting to be again entangled in action: —

'He renounces the worship of the gods, the worship of his ancestors, caste, home, the use of fire, marriage, family, money, property, amusements, work of every kind, and ordinary food and dress, and lives a wandering life getting his food by begging.' (J.N. Farquhar).

The *sadhu* is a variant of the *sanyasi*. He also renounces the world but is specially interested in visiting places of pilgrimage. He goes from religious fair to religious fair and from temple to temple. Often he may wear a cotton robe of saffron, the traditional colour of sanctity, or may clothe himself in a mass of rags, or a brief loincloth or nude nothingness. His hair is often long matted and uncombed, and his body and face may be smeared with ashes. He goes from door to door with his meal bag or bowl collecting his daily ration or handful of meal.

India pays most profound respect to all who have renounced the world to seek the way of enlightenment and emancipation. There are hundreds of thousands of these men in India, but not all are worthy. Many are immoral, criminal, smokers of drugs and ignorant. Many masquerade in sadhu fashion to win an easy life as beggars, but all are given a measure of respect because one here and there is a true seeker and has walked further along the way of mystic knowledge than have his fellows.

From his earliest years, Sundar Singh's village mother had taught him respect for true sadhuhood. For her it had been the highest way of life, and now in Sapatu as he faced the future the appeal of the saffron robe attracted him. By donning it he could sit down by a strange village and be fairly sure that some kindly soul would seek to win merit by bringing him food. He determined to adopt the sadhu way and go on a pilgrimage through the land using it as a means by which he could give to all the message of the Risen Lord and His peace. Years later he said to me: 'I am not a sadhu. I adopted this method as a convenient way of getting about without encumbering myself with luggage and gear.'

One thing he probably did not realise. The Hindu Sadhu has renounced caste and is received on that basis by the whole Hindu community. He may look to any of them for food and shelter. But their caste rules would not extend that privilege to a Christian sadhu, and many times he went shelter less and hungry because the bonds of caste were too strictly drawn to allow them to show their natural kindness.

The Sadhu Way

A month after his baptism Sundar Singh got rid of his few possessions, put on the long robe of the sadhu, and set out barefooted over the rocky roads of Subathu along a road that was to take him to the ends of the earth. On that November day of 1905 he began a long pilgrimage that brought him into the homes of the poor and into the palaces of princes. Often treated as an outcaste and refused food and shelter, he knew also how to abound among the adulations of great people. At times he travelled in modern luxury and lived in the homes of the wealthy; but it was the hard way and the road of suffering that always attracted him, for in his weariness and amid its dangers he felt best the nearness of his Lord and the peace of His presence.

His first tour took him back through the villages that he knew around Rampur. One evening he went to his father's home, but the father was not willing to receive this son who had disgraced them so greatly by leaving the Sikh faith. Finally he agreed to Sundar staying for the night, but told him that he must leave in the morning. When the meal was ready he was told to sit apart, and water was given to him poured from a vessel held high above lest he should pollute it with his touch. Sick at heart, and with tears in his eyes, he thanked his father for his past love as well as for this treatment, and going out slept under a tree near the village.

From there he went up into the central Punjab where Christian communities are numerous, and then passed on through the western district where Mohammedans predominate. He crossed the Indus into Baluchistan, and then went north to Peshawar and on through the fanatical Afridi tribes of the Khyber Pass till he came to the city of Jalalabad in Afghanistan. Wherever he went he preached Jesus in whom he had found God and peace, but as he could not speak Pashtu he had to turn back from Jalalabad.

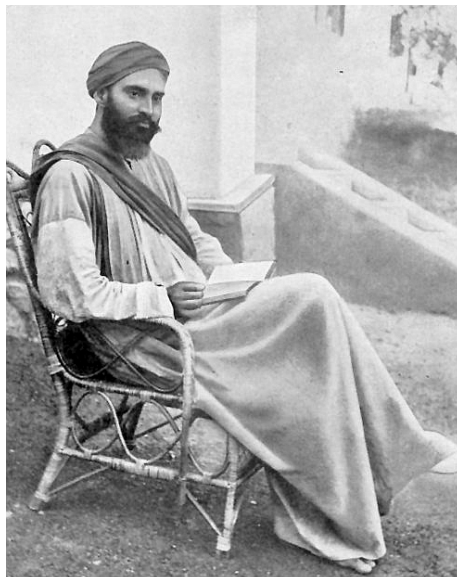
An Indian lady, then a nurse in the mission hospital at Peshawar told me how they found Sundar Singh in the Gor Khatri in Peshawar City. He was very worn and thin and his feet were in a bad state with sores. He preached on Sunday in the Church and told how God had delivered him in Jalalabad. When it became known that a defenceless *Nasara*, or a Christian, was at a house in their city some of the Mohammedan fanatics there planned to kill him. A man who was less hostile gave him a warning and he moved to the open *sarai* which is the halting-place for caravans from Central Asia. It was a night of bitter cold and rain. He was soaked through and passed the hours till daylight in the greatest discomfort. In the morning as he dried his clothes and warmed his chilled body at a fire, a crowd of Afghans from the city came into the *sarai* searching for him. He thought that his end had come, but when they saw that he was unharmed by the bitter cold of the winter night they were convinced that he must be under the special protection of Allah. The leader bowed before him and begged that he would come and stay at his house and give them the message which he had received from God. Sundar spent several days with them and had a happy time in giving his witness to the salvation that is to be found in Jesus.

From the Frontier Province he went through the two hundred miles of mountains that lie between the plains and the lovely valley of Kashmir. From one of the illustrations used by him in later years we see how the little incidents of his daily life were always being sorted out by his reflective mind to bring light on to the coming of the Divine Son into our humanity. He said:

“I remember in Kashmir a man who had several hundred sheep. Each morning his servants took the sheep out to graze on the mountain sides, and in the evening brought them back to the fold for safety. There they used to count them. At times some of them were missing, but when the owner told his servants to go back and look for them they were afraid of the wild animals and would not go. The owner valued his sheep and could not bear to think of them wandering at night on the mountains. One night when some of them were missing, he said: ‘If I go for them myself they will not recognize me. They are accustomed to my servants being with them on the hill sides, but not to seeing me there. They will not follow me.’ So he took a sheepskin and wrapped it round him and went out into the evening mist. He found some of them, lost and bleating in distress. When they saw him they were not afraid of him. They thought he was a sheep and followed him home. It was only after he had put them in the fold that he took off the skin and they saw that he was a man.”

‘That,’ said the Sadhu, ‘was what God did for lost men. He clothed Himself in the robe of our humanity so that He would be like us, and we would not be afraid of him. He led us back to the fold, and when He had laid aside the robe of human form we saw that He was God.’

Leaving Kashmir he made his way over the three hundred miles of wild mountains to Kotgarh at the back of Simla. There he was joined by Mr. Stokes and in the hot weather they toured together in the hills of the Kangra Valley. It was not an easy tour, for though some of the customs of the Hindus of the hills are not looked on as orthodox by the Brahmins of the plains, they were not willing to lower their caste barriers to help Christians, and the two sadhus often went without food and shelter, and sometimes had to eat berries for food and to sleep under rocks and trees. Finally Sundar Singh got a severe fever in a lonely place, and it was only with great difficulty that Mr. Stokes got him to the bungalow of a European planter, who took him in and nursed him back to health.



Reading his New Testament in Urdu

Mr. Stokes, a wealthy American had come to India to demonstrate the life of poverty, celibacy and obedience that was the manner of life practised by mediaeval saints devoted to God. He became one of a small brotherhood sworn to these ideals which had received some recognition from the Archbishop of Canterbury, and was later inaugurated in Lahore Cathedral. Sundar Singh associated himself with

these men though he never took their vow as he had already vowed himself to total renunciation as a sadhu. They went together on tours in the hills and on the plains, worked among the untainted children of the Leper Home at Subathu, and in 1907 gave night and day service in a plague camp in Lahore, sleeping on the ground among the patients. For seven years Mr. Stokes lived in conditions of extreme poverty, though his bank account, unused, was still there as a rear line of defence should need arise. After a few years the brotherhood broke up. Its members left the rule of poverty and most of them married. Mr. Stokes bought property in the hills at the back of Simla, and took a hill woman as his wife. In the war, he served in the Indian Army, but later let himself go in the agitation for Indian self-government and served a jail sentence of six months for sedition. Hindu philosophy began to attract him and he found satisfaction in sitting in meditation in Hindu temples. Finally he joined the Arya Samaj sect of Hinduism by allowing the priests to perform the *shudhi*, or purification rite over him. He was unstable in character and his spiritual development depended on feeling more than on faith.

The last time the Sadhu saw him he said to him: 'I never believed in the doctrine of transmigration till I met you. You are always changing. You live in poverty, then in riches. You are a sworn celibate, then you marry. You are an army officer, then in prison for disloyalty. You find satisfaction in work for Christ, then in meditating in a Hindu temple. Finally you become a Hindu. Every six months you are something new. The doctrine of transmigration has its proof in you.'

One of the characteristics in Sundar Singh that caused trouble to precise western minds was that they were often unable to get from him a definite statement of where and when a thing happened. This vagueness on matters of geography and history is common to many Indians, but in this case he could keep no diaries of his tours to fix the times of his wandering, and his recollection of places was apt to be blurred when he was seeing new places every day.

He began his years as a sadhu without any expectation of fame but by 1912 some of his friends, to whom he had recounted some of his experiences of the direct intervention of God, felt that they should share them with the Indian Church. They therefore published part of the story in pamphlet form. This at once fired the imagination of the Indian Church. They felt that at last a Christian sadhu with genuine mystic experience had arisen among them. In his search for God this young sadhu had 'arrived' and they wanted to meet him, and through him to have the obscuring veil of material things lifted that they, too, might catch a glimpse of spiritual reality. They felt that now they had among them one in the true tradition of India's ancient seers and ascetics who had 'arrived' in the search for God, and it increased their spiritual self-respect as a community. At meetings they listened to him with rapt respect, and at the close counted it a blessing to be able to sit with him in reverent expectation of some words that would further lift the veil that they too might see beyond their human limitations and know the things of God. From this time on Sadhu Sundar Singh's doings were known increasingly to the Christian public.

Tibet

Early in 1908 he visited Bombay, Central India and the Central Provinces, but in the hot weather he went back into the hills at Poo, a high mountain station of the Moravian Mission. For two months he accompanied one of their preachers on a preaching tour, and then, having become more familiar with borderland conditions, crossed over to Tibet. This was his first journey on to the icy plateau of that land, but almost every season after that till 1917, he crossed over the high snow passes into Tibet. It was a serious undertaking for a boy, clothed only in a cotton robe and blanket, to climb the narrow cliff roads to the top of the passes sometimes 20,000 feet high. On those passes icy blizzards blow almost every day, and men well clothed with sheepskin coats often perish in the cold. In 1929 on the top of the 18,000 feet high Bara Hoti Pass, the leader of a caravan of pack sheep and yaks told me that on his previous crossing, six of his men had been frozen to death. Once across the passes, the Sadhu had to swim or wade through icy rivers, and journey through dreary inhospitable areas with only far-scattered villages. In addition there were always dangers from robber bands, and from fanatical officials and Buddhist lamas. Yet on some of his journeys the Sadhu penetrated upwards of two hundred and fifty miles before turning back.

On his return in 1908 he acted on the advice of Bishop Lefroy of Lahore and began the course at St. John's Divinity College. After two years there he was licensed to preach and recommended for deacon's orders. Long afterwards he said to me: 'I did not like it, but stayed on out of regard for Bishop Lefroy.'

Next year, after a short trip into Tibet, he worked for a time under the CMS (Church Missionary Society) at Kotgarh. But the set limits of regular district work chafed him. He therefore asked Bishop Lefroy to take back his license to preach, and the Bishop was big enough to see that freedom was essential to him. Henceforth Sundar Singh's license to preach was not that given by any organized Church. It was the call of God to give the message of his experience to needy men everywhere in whatever branch of the Christian brotherhood they might be.

To these years, when he wandered about as an almost unknown sadhu, belong some of those strange experiences of divine companionship and help that when reported, began to focus on him, the spotlight of Indian interest. It is true that these interventions of help from the unseen world mostly came to him in times of extreme physical exhaustion, when the borders between fact and fancy are blurred, and what is then seen may be largely subjective. The Sadhu however had no doubt that helpers who came were God's messengers. As such he saw them and gave thanks to God for His help.

On one of his earlier journeys with Mr. Stokes he had to swim a swollen mountain river. The Sadhu went in first and was carried down into the broken water of the rapids. After great exertion he got near the other side, but his strength was exhausted; from the near bank Mr. Stokes saw a number of hill men rush down into the water and seize him as he was carried past. They lifted him out and brought

him ashore. But what Sundar Singh saw in that instant was that God had sent His angels to snatch him from sure death.

Once when he was preaching in Pepal the villagers seized him, bound him hand and foot to a tree, and left him. All through the day he was left without food and drink. At night, in spite of his cramped position, he fell asleep from exhaustion. When he woke at dawn, he saw God's hand, when he found that his bonds had been loosed and fruit placed beside him.

Again at Kamyam there was bitter hostility to his preaching and the day passed without having been able to get any food. Hungry and weary he went to sleep in the jungle. About midnight someone touched him and he saw two men with food and water standing by him. When he had eaten he turned to thank them but they were gone. Again it was from God that he saw his help had come.

He recounted to me his terrible experience of the well at Risar in Tibet. He was fully convinced that on that occasion God's direct help saved him in his extremity. He had penetrated ten marches beyond Kailash Mountain and had reached the village of Risar. He was arrested for preaching another religion, and brought before the local Buddhist official who ordered that he be cast into a dry well outside the village.

As a Buddhist is forbidden by his religion to kill any living creature, they have found indirect ways of accomplishing the same end without breaking the letter of their religious law. In one case they sew up a condemned man in a fresh yak skin, if one available, and put it out in the sun. As the skin shrinks he is slowly crushed to death by the increasing pressure of the green hide. Their part in the killing ends with their sewing him into the skin. The forces that cause the shrinking are not under their control, so they are not guilty in case of death. In this case the official felt that his responsibility ended at the well mouth. He had no control over what happened in the well. There Sundar could die in his own way without involving him in the killing. Many had already gone to their death in that well under cover of the same reasoning.

Sundar found himself in darkness in a well-pit foul with rotting bodies, and an iron cover over the well-top was locked. In that foul darkness, where at every movement he touched rotting flesh, and in a stench that made breathing almost impossible, he felt that God had indeed forsaken him. Without food and water, and sick from the foul air, he felt that he could not live many hours. The impression he carried away of those dragging hours of misery was that he remained there for two whole nights, and then on the third night he saw the cover opened and a rope let down. He slipped the noose over his arms and was pulled out and lay senseless by the well. Gradually the air revived him, and in the morning he made his way back to the village. There he was seized and brought before the official who demanded to know who had released him. As the Sadhu could not tell, search was made for the key, but it was found to be in its place in the official's own girdle. Amazed and in superstitious dread he ordered the Sadhu to leave at once lest his powerful God should bring some great calamity upon them all.

In times of danger and great physical and mental strain men have often seen the thoughts of their minds take bodily shape, and have been convinced that for their help an angel of the Lord had appeared. It was so with the Antarctic explorer Shakleton and his two companion of South Georgia when the Australian member of the party said: 'Boss, it seemed to me as if there was a fourth man with us.' And all of them confessed to having been conscious of the same presence.

Secret Disciples

During those years the Sadhu made annual visits to the border of Tibet, and far into the uplands of that cold and bleak land. On more than one occasion he visited Kailash, the sacred mountain of the Hindus which lies north of Lake Mansarowar. Pilgrims from India who go there make a circuit of it as the consummation of their fatiguing and dangerous tramp up through nearly three hundred miles of Himalayan gorges and passes. In caves in the mountain are many ascetics who have sought release in that ultimate spot of Hindu sanctity. The Sadhu tells of one who was completely up in a cave with only a small hole through which food could be passed to him. He saw another with his long hair tied to the roof of his cave that he might not fall asleep while giving the maximum of time to prayer. To these men, practicing such austerities to win their salvation, he went with his message that it is not by the righteous works that we have done but by grace of Jesus Christ that we are saved.

He once had a remarkable experience on the slopes of Mt. Kailash. On a snowy evening, half blind with snow blindness, he lost his way and stumbled on a cave in the hillside. Within he found a very old hermit who proclaimed himself to be a Christian three hundred and eighteen years old. The Sadhu said that though that was the old man's claim, he himself thought that he would be about a hundred years old. He prayed in the name of Jesus, and had with him an ancient version of the New Testament in Greek.

He told how he had been a Mohammedan hermit, who had renounced the world and had spent long periods in prayer. Then a Christian saint from India had taught him of Christ, and in Him he had found the way to peace. For many years he had wandered as a Christian preacher, but when too old for that work he had retired to Mt. Kailash, and now spent his time in prayer and meditation.

He claimed that it had been granted to him that his soul could leave his body and pass through the whole earth to help brethren in distress. He had many stories of what he had seen in these soul-journeys, and of the state of those who die in the faith of Jesus, or in a state of ignorance and rebellion. The Sadhu thought that many of the hermit's visions were like spiritualists scenes, with which he was not able to agree. He visited the old man on three occasions, and the account which he brought back to India of the old hermit aroused great interest among Christians there.

The old hermit was looked on as the head of a sect of Christian disciples, with whom the Sadhu came in contact at various places and at various times. They professed to be about twenty-four thousand in number. Their manner of life and way of dress is not different from that of Hindus. The Sadhu first met them at Sarnath, a Buddhist centre of pilgrimage in India, and later at Banarasi, Jabalpur, Haridwar and many other places. They are well organized and have seven hundred *Swamis*, or leaders, who, dressed as ordinary *sanyasis*, go about teaching and conducting worship for their members, or *Shish*, who are mostly educated and wealthy. They practise baptism, celebrate the Lord's Supper and read the Bible. They say that at present they work in secret, but that the time is not far

distant when they will proclaim themselves openly. Since the Sadhu first met them others have had contact with them in South India as well as in the North.

Once Sundar Singh was preaching in a town on the bank of Ganges in Garhwal where the people are bigoted and fanatical Hindus. Some young men dared him to preach the same things within the town. He went into the bazaar and began to preach. In the hope of hearing a good argument some of the people hurried off to call a learned pundit who lived there. When he arrived, he at once went up to Sundar Singh, and before them all put his fore-finger into the Sadhu's mouth to show that they were both of one caste and said to him: 'I have done this to show that we are brothers, as indeed we are, for we both believe in Jesus Christ as our Saviour.' The result was that the hostile gathering dispersed and Sundar accompanied the pundit to his home where they spent the day in happy fellowship. The pundit was one of the *sanyasis* of the Secret Disciples.

We have no detailed account of incidents during those Tibetan journeys. The Sadhu seldom spoke of what happened to him. Only when he could use them as telling illustrations of texts would he sometimes open the door a little, and let us see the hard life he lived in those days.

Once he told how he and a Tibetan companion were stumbling along a cliff road in bitter cold with snow falling and a blizzard blowing. Both were finding it hard to keep going when they came on a man lying in the snow. The Sadhu suggested that they carry him to safety, but the other refused saying that it would be hard enough to save themselves. He went on and the Sadhu began to work on the man. Finally he managed to get him on his back and stumbled on. The effort warmed him and the unconscious man got some warmth from his body. Further along the road they came on the body of his companion lying in the snow. He had been overcome with cold and was dead. 'That,' said the Sadhu, 'was what the Lord meant when He said, "Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it".'

The village people of Tibet live in conditions in which personal cleanliness is not always possible. Much of their time in the winter cold is passed indoors. Their clothes are heavy homespun woollen garments, or coats of sheepskin with wool still on, and are not suitable for washing. On their unwashed faces and hands dirt lies in oily flakes.

On one occasion the Sadhu went down to a stream outside a village to bathe. When he looked up he found that the whole village was lined up along the bank watching him in amazement. 'You must be a very dirty man,' said one, 'to have to wash like that.' 'When did you last have a bath?' asked the Sadhu. 'Not very long ago,' said the man. 'It couldn't have been more than twelve years ago.'

Among nomad shepherds, in monasteries of Buddhist Lamas, to hermits in their caves in the sacred Kailash Mountain, among wayfarers and robber bands the Sadhu went year after year with his message of the new and abundant life that is to be found in the Living Lord Jesus.

The Fast and the Second Vision

When the Sadhu returned from Tibet 1912 he toured in Bombay, Bengal, North India and Rajputana. Early in the next year he went to Haridwar on the Ganges to carry out a plan that had long been in his mind. He has told us that during these years of toil and danger, and of cold and want and loneliness, he had sometimes felt the temptation to give up his hard way of life and go back to the ease and fellowship of his father's home at Rampur. Also he was conscious that he had in him certain weaknesses that he felt were not worthy a true follower of Christ. He was sometimes impatient and irritated when people pressed about him, and at times doubt came into his mind as to whether the Sadhu way, was truly the way that God had chosen for him. In order to find a higher plane of Christian living that would be free from these weaknesses, he planned that at some time he would 'imitate the forty days' fast which was Christ's initiation to the work to which He was called. In fulfilment of this purpose in February 1913, he went into the far depths of Kajili Ban, the jungle that lies between Haridwar and Dehra Dun, and began his fast. Day by day he sat there in meditation and prayer. As his bodily strength declined his mental and spiritual faculties became clearer. At last, when his strength was altogether gone, he swooned. But before darkness came down upon him he saw once more a vision of the Lord, but this time it was the Lord in glory of the Father, and bearing the wounds of the Cross that he saw.

Woodcutters passing through the jungle found him lying unconscious. They wrapped him in a blanket and carried him to Rishikesh station, and from there he was taken by train to Dhera Dun. It happened that on that day men from the Christian village of Annfield were at the station with a bullock cart. They took him with them to Annfield, where he was cared for by the pastor and the Christians. It always seemed to the Sadhu that it was a special mercy of God that the cart was at the station that day.

As soon as his health was somewhat restored he started out again. I was then staying at Nahan, and there the Sadhu stopped to see me. He said nothing about his fast, but was pale and thin as if he had just been through a severe illness. Some years later some of his critics were denying that he had ever fasted, or had ever been near Kajili Ban at that time. He was greatly relieved when I told him that I had made a note of his visit in my diary of 16th March 1913. He felt that it was a confirmation of his attitude to all criticism, that God in His own time would let the truth come to light.

By this time Sundar Singh's name was becoming known to a wide circle of Indians and of European Christians. During his fast someone had sent telegrams to his friends announcing his death. When he reached Simla he first learned of the telegrams and of the memorial service that had already been held in the church there. He said that he attributed the telegrams to a Dr. Swift with whom he travelled on the train in Rajputana. Dr. Swift had got from him the names of some of his friends, that in case he did not return from his fast they might be informed. Dr. Swift received word from a friend in Dehra Dun, that the Sadhu seemed to have altogether disappeared and therefore sent off the messages.

It is not possible that he completed the full forty day's fast. From the dates that we can fix we know that the fast could not have lasted more than eighteen days. But the experience of his fast brought him a notable expansion of his spiritual life. From that time on his life was one of real and unbroken fellowship with his Lord whose rewarding presence he counted as the best of God's gifts.

What Followed from the Second Vision

Peace:

The intense preparation of his soul during the days of his fast, and the vision of the glorified Lord, wounded with the wounds of our redeeming, gave him a clearer realisation of the immensity of the sacrifice by which our Lord obtained eternal redemption for us. In the light of this new revealing, his former doubts and longings, and the rebellion of his spirit against his hard life, ceased to count. The vision had given him a new standard for his life. The persecution that he had suffered, the weariness of hard journeying, the hunger, thirst and cold of mountain ways, were no longer measured by their effect on him, but by what his Saviour had suffered. In comparison with the infinity of that suffering his own sufferings now seemed trivial, and the thought of that gave him unruffled calm and peace that many in the rush of Modern life found to be an unfolding of the peace of God to them.

Persecution:

A second result that followed from the vision and the new light that it brought was that in the years immediately following, he had to pass through a period of bitter persecution and hostile criticism. How is this upsurge of hostility to be explained? Was it the reaction made by men in whom is the spirit of darkness, against one in whom was a new illumination from the Spirit of light? Was it the age-long struggle between the sons of God and the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience? Whatever the cause may have been these days held much bitter hostility for the Sadhu.

Shortly after his fast a Hindu wrote to *Nur Afshan*:

‘A few days ago a Christian sadhu named Sundar Singh came preaching the Gospel in villages about Narkanda, and suffered a great deal of persecution. As we were sitting talking, a farmer named Nandi said: “A very strange thing happened in our village. One day while we were reaping a sadhu came up and began to preach religion. We were annoyed at his interference with our work and began to curse him. He took no notice of our curses and threats and went on with his talk. Then my brother threw a stone and hit the man on the head. But this good man, overlooking the insult, closed his eyes and said: ‘Oh God, forgive them.’ After a while my brother got a splitting headache and had to stop reaping. The sadhu took up my brother’s sickle and began to help with the cutting. We were amazed and said: “What kind of man is this sadhu, who instead of cursing us prays for us. We took him to our house, and he told us many profitable things.” And the writer adds, ‘I request the sadhuji to come again to the same village that we may benefit by his holy teaching.’

Another letter also appeared in *Nur Afshan*, signed by E. Das of the Forest Department. In it he tells how one day as he came down a mountain road he saw a sadhu with a blanket on his shoulder and a few books in his hand. He determined to follow him. The sadhu strode along in the heat of midday till he reached a village. There he sat on a log and began to sing. When the village people knew that he

was Christian, they became hostile, and one of them knocked the holy man down, cutting his hand and cheek. The sadhu bound up his hand with his turban, and with blood still running down his face began to sing a song of praise to God, and then asked for God's blessing in them all.

The writer adds that so deep was the impression made on them that the man who had thrown the sadhu down had already been baptised, while he himself, a devoted *Arya Samajist*, now writes to beg his readers to pray for him that he may be able to confess openly his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The year after the fast, when in Darjeeling, the Sadhu went on into Nepal territory and preached. He was ordered to leave, but went on till he came to Ilom. There he was arrested and cast into prison. He preached to the prisoners in the jail and the convicts heard him gladly. The authorities of the jail, fearing that some of the prisoners might become Christians and so get them into trouble, took him out, stripped him, fixed his hands and feet in wooden stocks, and left him in a cowshed. Someone then emptied a basket of leeches over his naked body. He could do nothing to get rid of them, and they attached themselves to his body and round his eyes. He thought: 'This is the end. Tomorrow I shall be dead.' But while he prayed, the fire of God fell on him. God's immediate presence was with him. It was as if a charge of electricity had passed through him and had set his whole being aglow. He was conscious of God being with him, and experienced the rapture of His presence. In the uplift of that intense joy he forgot leeches, hunger, thirst and the certainty of death. 'Can heaven be better than this?' he asked. He said he had no ear for music and could not sing, but his intense joy expressed itself in song and he sang on for a great part of the night. In the morning his keepers expected to find him in a state of collapse, and the jail authorities were amazed at the evident joy he was experiencing. It shone from his face, and they saw him as one possessed of God. In superstitious fear, they opened the stocks and sent him away.

A few days later his previous companion, Tarchin, a Tibetan Christian, met him stumbling back to Darjeeling. He said that the Sadhu's body was a mass of wounds, sores and swellings, and he specially mentioned the swollen condition of the eyes. A missionary, with whom the Sadhu stayed some time after this, said that at that time he still had the scars of the leeches all over his body.

In recounting this experience to me the Sadhu said: 'It is a strange thing. It is not joy in suffering that Christ gives, but He turns the suffering itself into joy.'

Spiritual vision:

Yet another result of the Sadhu's vision of the Man of Sorrows wounded and yet glorified, and seated at the place of power in the glory of the Father, was that not long after he began to see visions of the spirit-world, and to have conversations with the spiritual beings who dwell there.

One day at Kotgarh, about 1913, he was sitting in the pines on the mountain side, praying for the boys of the Mission school. Suddenly his spiritual eyes were opened and he saw the glories of the spirit-world. It was so overwhelming an experience that he thought he must have died. Only gradually did he realise that it was a vision that he had seen.

After that he had visions from time to time. In them he saw the joy and brightness of heaven. He saw, too, the people there smiling but he did not have conversation with them. The vision always brought him inexpressible bliss. 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 at a later time in his addresses and books, came in large part from the illumination which he had received during these conversations.

The visions came to him at all sorts of times and in many different places. Sometimes when he was sitting in a chair praying or meditating, the vision would come and transport him into the heavenlies. Once when sitting under a tree, and at another time when he was travelling in a packed railway carriage, the rapture came. All the time he would be dimly conscious of what was going on around him. Those sitting beside him were not aware that he had passed into the unseen world, and ended, it left no sense of tiredness but only ineffable joy.

The visions were not the product of hallucinations of a diseased mind. He counted them as a special gift from God. He could not call them up when he wanted them, but when he was sitting quietly his eyes would be opened and his ears tuned to hear the unutterable things of the spirit-world.

All the details of the unseen world appeared to him in such surpassing brightness and beauty that they were ever after graven deep on his mind. He could forget none of them. Nor could he forget the satisfying feeling of fellowship that came to him from his talks with saints and angels. It made him long for the time when he would be able to resume permanently the interrupted conversations. For him the communion of saints became a very real and revealing experience.

The angelic being into whose presence he was transported, did not carry on conversations in any language but by a kind of spiritual illumination, so that without words spoken he knew the thought that the being had to convey to him. Often the meaning of the thing revealed was so profound that Sadhu could find no words in his Urdu mother tongue in which he could express it. Only the simpler revelations were capable of being expressed in words at all.

I have a vivid recollection of the night when he first told me of his visions. I had known him intimately for years before then, but he had never mentioned them. He had been staying with me in Kharar when I was translating one of his books from his manuscript. On one of those hot weather nights we were sitting outside when he began to tell me about them. For an hour and a half in the darkness we paced up and down before my bungalow while he poured out his amazing story. As he told it he became greatly excited and his voice grew louder and louder till it boomed out over the compound silencing the chattering from the servants' lines as they listened in awe to his tale. There could be no question about the reality of the joy that the visions brought to him.

The things which he saw in times of vision, and the talks which he had with saints and angels supplied him with knowledge which made his messages crystal clear. I had often been struck with the lucid way he dealt with subjects that were often complex, and by the way he thought in pictures. It was only later that I learned that his pictures were not the creation of an unusually vivid imagination, but were reproductions of things he had seen and heard while he tarried in company with saints and angels.

Language is a poor instrument to convey to another any of our deeper emotions, and the Sadhu constantly maintained that he could put in words only the very simplest of the things seen and heard in that other world. Beyond these lay the incommunicables for which he could find no words. In his effort to convey these concepts he had often to fall back on oriental imagery: 'The mother's heart was flooded with joy, and when they embraced one another their tears of joy were like flowers.' 'When the man of God, in company with the angels, arrived at the door of his appointed mansion he saw written in shining letters the word "WELCOME" and from the letters themselves, "Welcome, Welcome" in audible sound was repeated again and again.' 'The degree of goodness reached by the soul of a righteous man is known by the brightness that radiates from his whole appearance; for the character and nature show themselves in the form of various glowing rainbow-like colours of great glory.'

I struggled hard to analyse the picture of that spiritual world which he had retained in his mind. It had something in it of the still of dreams, yet it was not unreal and never grotesque. Its hills and fields were bright with flowers and grass. Its rivers and trees and dwellings were set in a glory of beauty, but they were conceived of as material in form only and not in substance. When the time of vision had ended, he came back to an earth that seemed unbelievably dim and uninteresting. He said that to return to consciousness of his earthly surroundings was like coming back to prison.

Between the lowest hell and the highest heaven was an intermediate state in which were innumerable grades or planes into which the souls of men passed according to the measure of divine life to which they had attained on earth. When asked how he reconciled this teaching with the teaching of the Bible concerning the irrevocable nature of the divine judgment, he said that he could not reconcile it. He had asked about it, but ‘they’ had said that there was in every man a divine spark¹, and while that was there, there was the possibility that he would make progress in the knowledge and love of God. In all the grades, souls were instructed by angels, and if they responded they became cleansed of self and of pride and were fitted to pass to higher grades, and finally to reach the presence of God Himself.

The judgment of souls was made through the all-revealing light of the glory of God. In that light those who on earth had ‘*become partakers of the divine nature*,’ and had walked in the light, found themselves in an atmosphere that was in harmony with their renewed natures, and entered into the joy of their Lord. But those who on earth had been governed by self and had not lived in obedience to God, found their darkness and sin made visible in that all revealing light, and, finding no peace there, in shame sought for the darkness to cover them. Some souls there were so irrevocably evil that the divine spark had been quenched in them:

‘It is a strange thing said the Sadhu, that though Jesus was in the midst of heaven, yet wherever one looked — at a group of children playing, or at a group of women, or at a band of people singing praises — Jesus was in the midst of them, too. God was not seen except by the highest angels who alone could bear the light of His Presence.’

¹ Romans 2:14-15.

At God's Call

His Call to South India:

By the vision at the fast and by the experiences that followed it, Sundar Singh was especially prepared to enter on a larger work. For two years after his return from the fast we hear about him only occasionally from different parts of India, or from the hills as he returned from the Tibetan passes. During these years many people had become interested in him. His adventures had been written up in Indian Christian papers, and in 1916 a small and not very accurate book published by an Indian friend, who had experience of sensational journalism in America, added to this interest and made Hindus and Christians anxious to know more of him.

Even before his baptism, Sundar Singh had felt an urge to preach Jesus to non-Christians as the revealer of God. Now there was opening up for him the greater work of giving to the world the new and fuller Gospel which he had so hardly won, of the real life of peace that those find who live consciously in the presence of the Living Lord Jesus. The call now came to him to be a preacher of this Gospel to his Christian brethren, first in India and the East, and then to the far countries of the West.

The particular call that came to him now, came during one of his times of vision. I once asked him if he had ever had guidance about his work given to him during a vision. 'Only once', he replied. 'At the end of 1917 I was in Baroda, and planned to return to Subathu by a train leaving at five the next morning. At nine I retired. In my room a vision came, and among other things, I was told to go to South India.' At eleven o'clock he went and told his host that he would not be leaving at five as arranged. Next morning at nine a telegram was brought to him. 'Come to South India.'

In South India during the last two hundred years since Protestant Missions began working in that area, a large Christian community has been built up, but their Christian witness was often formal, and they were far from energetic in proclaiming the Gospel. Too often their whole interest was bounded by their own congregation, and they felt no duty to make known the way of Christ's salvation to their neighbours. The exclusiveness that is basic in Hindu caste thought, had so penetrated their thinking that they had as little interest in the salvation of others as if they themselves had been a caste of Hindus.

There is also in South India the ancient Syrian Church which was a flourishing body of Christians in the second century of our era, and which a fairly reliable tradition says was founded by the Apostle Thomas in the first century. It has continued as a separate church down through the centuries and still numbers over five hundred thousand in the Kerala State. It too had become circumscribed in its outlook and was not an evangelizing force.

Early in his visit the Sadhu issued a call to the youth of these Churches:

‘Oh young men, awake and see how many souls are daily perishing around you. Is it not your duty to save them? Be brave soldiers of Christ. Go forward in full armour. Crush Satan’s work, and victory shall be yours.’

‘Glory to God! He has given you a precious opportunity to be saved and to save others. If you are careless now, you will never get another chance, for you will never pass through the field of battle again. The day is fast approaching when you will see the martyrs in their glory, who gave their health, wealth and life to win souls for Christ. They have done much. Oh, may we not blush in that day.’

Before long he was addressing meetings of the Syrian Church in North Travancore. At one, twenty thousand were present, and at another thirty-two thousand. For over nine months he held meetings in many of the towns of the Madras Presidency. Wherever he went thousands flocked to hear him, and a wave of spiritual awakening followed that made its influence felt not only among the Christians but among non-Christians as well. In one place, nineteen non-Christians were converted, another thirteen, with their wives. Almost every letter sent to him at this time, tells of other non-Christians who had been brought to Christ by his message.

In May he crossed to Ceylon, and during six weeks on the island had meetings of great spiritual power. He found the Church there rich in possessions but poor in fellowship, because it had in it caste distinctions. His call to them to share in the fellowship of the Living Lord Jesus, and to seek the abiding peace of those who really know Him, was the means of winning many to surrender fully their lives to Jesus as Lord.

I have before me a considerable number of letters sent from both South India and Ceylon at that time in which the writers pour out gratitude of a warm-hearted people for the blessing the Sadhu had brought to them.

A gentleman writes: ‘Ever since you left Calicut, I have been looking back with gratitude on those blessed days you spent with us... We were again reminded of those days when last week a Mohammedan young man came to us and said that he had decided to become a Christian as the result of listening to you.’

A lady writes from Colombo: ‘Last night after hearing your most impressive address, it came to me quite clearly that the message was one from Jesus Christ Himself. I know therefore that I have been forgiven... If therefore your visit to Ceylon results in nothing more than setting the feet of one solitary sinner, who had wandered from God, towards Calvary, surely you have given cause for the angels in heaven to rejoice greatly.’

In another letter it says: ‘When you were in Calicut the Sub-Postmaster heard you or heard God’s voice through you. Some days after he saw Christ calling him in a dream. He comes every day to read with me. He says he wants to be baptised and fully follow Christ.’

Those were busy days for him. He often spoke three times a day, and wherever people could get near to him they crowded round to sit at his feet. His rest at night was often broken. Once when he had gone to bed at one o’clock, he was wakened at two to speak to a Brahmin who needed spiritual guidance that kept him talking till daylight.

He was often asked to bless them and their children, but his reply always was: 'How can these hands that have torn up the Bible be used to bless? There is no power in these hands, but only in the pierced hands of Christ.'

At the request of a grief stricken mother he went to the hospital at Colombo to pray for a boy who was dying of pneumonia, whom the doctors had given up. The boy began to recover from that hour, and later was able to be present at one meeting with the Sadhu. But the Sadhu found that this answer to prayer made people see him as a wonder-worker. He said: '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, as it would encourage superstition and distract from the Gospel I had come to preach.'

From a Madras paper we take this picture of Sundar Singh as he stands before an audience dressed in his saffron robe: '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 mental pictures formed of him — he was incomparably superior to all I had thought of him. As I heard the sweet words issue from the lips of the Sadhu, who stood before me a visible symbol of the spiritual culture of the East, set aglow in the resplendent light of the Gospel — a vessel of eastern art and beauty chosen by the Lord, and filled with His Spirit — my scepticism vanished like clouds before the rising sun, and the dreams of my life seemed to touch the borders of the real. The problem of Christianity in India is solved, and the Sadhu has solved it.'

'Sadhu Sundar Singh, stranger as he was, was beloved of everyone who met him. His gentle manners, his kindness of heart, above all that inexpressibly beautiful smile — the visible reflections of the light of peace that shone in his heart — who can forget? A Hindu sanyasi the moment he saw him said: "From his face I could see that he has realised the bliss I am struggling after."'

The *Morning Star* of Jaffna, Ceylon, published the following: 'Sundar Singh has also a message for non-Christians. He has not attacked their religion. He has not scolded nor used harsh terms of reproach, but has fearlessly testified to his own failure after long and painful search to find peace and joy and satisfaction apart from God's great revelation in Jesus Christ.'

His Call to the East:

After eleven months of strenuous meetings in South India and Ceylon a call came to him to visit the Indian communities in Burma and Malaya. He spent a month in Burma and had deeply interested audiences. He arrived unexpectedly in Singapore and a meeting was hastily arranged for him. Then it was found that no interpreter was available. Though the Sadhu knew a good deal of English, he was very diffident about using it, especially in public meetings. But as he believed that God had called him to this work he agreed to try and speak in English. The English-speaking peoples of that polyglot city were delighted to hear him use a language that they could understand, and in the month that he spent in Malaya, he rapidly became an acceptable speaker in English. He said later that after he had heard the kind of English spoken by Japanese professors he thought that his English might not have been so bad.

From Singapore he went on to Japan, and then to China. Good meetings were arranged for him, but he was deeply impressed by the materialism that was everywhere manifest in Japan. He said:

‘In intellectual and spiritual matters, India has nothing to learn from Japan. Japan is no doubt a great country, but her recent victories (over Russia, 1904-1905) have shattered the foundations of her spiritual life. Japan has plunged herself into the soul-killing floods of Western materialism. Her eyes are filled with visions of material greatness. She is in a fury of money-making and has no ears for the Word of God. The saddest feature of the situation is her indifference to all religions. 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 susceptibilities of an ordinary Indian. The worst of it is, that Japan does not take even Buddhism seriously. Her temples are thronged with tourists and guides more than with devotees.’

His Call to English Speaking Lands:

The discovery that he could preach acceptably in English gave him a world-field in which he could make known his message, and one night when he was praying a clear call came to him to go to England. It had become a widely accepted idea in India that Britain had become so materialistic and immoral that for her, Christianity was no longer a living force. He wished to find out if this were true or not, and he desired that all those who have had experience of the Living Christ, should share in that fuller peace and joy that he himself had found.

His father, who was now sympathetic to Christian teaching, had given him his passage-money, and on 16th January 1920, he left Bombay. As usual he made no preparations for a programme of meetings. He was half-way to England before his friends there heard of his coming. He landed, a tall young man of thirty-one years, barefooted and wearing a saffron robe. Yet his personality and his message so caught the imagination of all classes that announcement that he was to speak was enough to fill any of the largest halls or churches. Everywhere it was felt that he came to them with a message out of his own vital experience; that is the Risen Lord alone who can give true peace in the troubled world.

His appearance in the street in His Sadhu’s robe and turban made him very conspicuous, and he often wore a raincoat to fit himself better into the colour scheme. He used to tell with great delight of how he was once going along a London street with two friends in a thick fog. The three stopped for a moment at the kerb before crossing. Just then a lady came along to post a letter. In the dim light she thought that the Sadhu in his long reddish robe was a pillar-box, and tried to post her letter in him. She was considerably startled when the pillar-box said: ‘Give me the letter. I’ll post it for you.’

Everywhere he went, men high in the religious world as well as leaders in science and philosophy sought to probe into the reality of his spiritual experiences, and though all could not admit that they were more than subjective, all were convinced of his evident sincerity. While he was a guest at the home of Sir Oliver Lodge they had long talks together about the spirit world, and the Sadhu always spoke of his sincere and simple Christian faith.

The Queen invited him to tea. With his Oriental respect for the command of Her Majesty, he was greatly embarrassed because for the same hour a meeting had been announced, and he did not know what he should do. Finally he wrote asking Her Majesty to excuse him as two thousand people would have assembled at that hour and he did not wish to disappoint them. The Queen graciously acceded to his request but it was always a regret to him that he had not been able to accept.

After three months in England he went to America, where he spoke at many large meetings. He was much impressed with the rush and hurry for wealth that he saw there. There was no rest. He said once: 'Christ would say, "Come unto Me all ye that are gold-laden, and I will give you rest." Still', he said, 'God's people are all over the world, and He has his own witnesses in the West as well as elsewhere.'

At one of the big Universities he was billed to speak. As he went into the campus he saw, in huge banner letters, a notice that the world-famous sadhu was to speak. It shocked him. 'When I saw it', he said, 'I was so ashamed that perspiration poured out of me.'

It is true that he found much in Western life that is materialistic and godless, but he always spoke with appreciation of the simple and devout godliness that he found in many of the homes in which he was a guest.

He spent two months in America, and then went on to Australia, where he was heartily welcomed, and in the chief cities great interest was created by his meetings.

In September 1920, he was back in Bombay. National feeling was running high in India at that time, and the nationally minded among the Christians felt that his return should be made a special occasion. Great receptions were arranged for him in Madras and South India, and he was being advertised as: 'The man who conquered the West.' But he could not face the thought of such lionizing and quietly slipped away. He said later on: 'While on my way to Bombay I heard at Colombo of the preparations being made for me in Madras and South India, and I thank my Christian brothers and sisters for their love. I feel it a very hard cross to bear when preparation are made for my reception. It is easier to starve, or to be in prison for Him — but a reception is a very great cross, and so I have come on straight to Bombay without informing anyone.'

In order to have a fixed spot to which he could return he bought an old school building at the outside end of Subathu bazaar. There he returned for rest and a measure of quiet, when he returned from the tours which he made in the Provinces of India during the next five years.

His Call to Europe:

Many invitations had come to him, pressing him to bring his message to the countries of Europe, where many were most anxious to hear him. On the 29th January 1922, he left Bombay for Egypt and then went on, as the guest of Sir William Willocks, to Palestine. It was a great joy to him to walk over the hills where our Lord had walked, to stand in the Temple area, to see the tomb in the garden, and to be at Nazareth and Tiberias and the Lake of Galilee. At every step he felt the nearness and personal presence of his Lord. He felt himself to be one of the disciple-band to whom the Lord had said, 'My peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you; ...as the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.' He felt again that there was his commission for the new task that he was about to begin of giving to the countries of Europe the message that Jesus lives, and that in that Life alone is peace to be found.

From Marseilles he went to Switzerland where he spoke to meetings of as many as ten thousand people. He found there a devout and simple religious life. In Germany he visited only six cities where great crowds heard him. But he was not happy in his spiritual contacts there. He felt that rational thought had denied his Lord's divinity, and that intellectualism, rather than personal relationship with the Living Son of God was considered a sufficient basis for Christian life. He stayed in Sweden with the brother of the King and also with the Archbishop of Uppsala. Here, as in the other Scandinavian

countries of Norway and Denmark and in Holland, he found a warm Christian fellowship. His meetings were crowded. At one meeting twenty thousand were present.

During his tour he was probably the most talked of man in Europe. The impression he made was very deep, and thousands were brought back to a realization that Christ lives, and that He is our peace. At the same time there was much criticism of him, of his experiences, of his visions and of his teaching.

In Europe the worldliness of nominal Christians, and the irreligion and immorality of large sections of people, caused bitter pain and disappointment to him. As the months of his tour went by, he became more and more a prophet, warning them of judgment because of their materialism, intellectualism and pleasure seeking. He told them:

‘In non-Christian countries men worship idols made with hands. In the so-called Christian countries I find a worse kind of heathenism — men worship themselves. When you see Him in His glory, then you will grieve that you did not believe in Him as your God. But then it will be too late. You have allowed yourselves to be led astray by unbelievers — by intellectual men who said you should not believe in His divinity. Repentance will then be too late. Perhaps in that day you will hear it said: “A man came to you from a heathen land; he bore witness to Me as the Living Christ because he had experienced My power and My glory, and yet you would not believe”.’

He had given them his witness and the work of his tour was done. ‘This is the first and the last time that you will ever see me,’ he told his hearers again and again. Disappointed in spirit, and utterly tired out in body with the unending succession of meetings and conversations, he sailed for England. There he spoke twice only in fulfilment of promises previously given, and immediately after sailed for India. The hardships of the Tibet Road with the presence of His Lord, were to him far better than the adulation and praise of Christian nations that knew not the peace of the presence of the Living Lord. He said: ‘I feel no fear at the thought of one day dying in Tibet. When that day comes, I shall welcome it with joy. Each year I go back to Tibet, and perhaps next year you will hear that I have lost my life there. Do not then think, “He is dead,” but say “He has entered heaven and eternal life and he is with Christ in perfect life.”’



Sundar preaching in a Church

His Call to Write:

The tremendous strain of months of big meetings with no possibility of rest from hours of conversation with interested people that followed them, told seriously on Sundar Sing's health. After his return from his European tour he was never the same man again. He had frequent attacks of severe pain and was more than once unconscious — once for a day and a half. After a meeting he almost always had such attacks. In these circumstances he was at times unable to travel, and hesitated to give any promise to speak at conventions where he was always a welcome speaker.

In these days another way of service opened up for him. Editors of magazines continually asked him for articles. It was of no use for him to plead that his English was faulty. The quaintness of his language, they insisted would add spice to the article. So he had to comply. These articles, a world-wide correspondence and visits from many Christian and non-Christian seekers filled up his time. In 1922 he published his first book in English, *At the Master's feet*. This was followed in the next few years by books in English on: *Reality and Religion*, *The Search after Reality*, *Meditations on Various Aspects of the Spiritual Life*, *Vision of the Spiritual World* and *With and Without Christ*. I sat with him and translated the four last from Urdu into English. These books had a wide circulation. Some of them went through seven editions, and some of the books, or parts of them, were translated into over forty languages. God made them the means of leading souls to Christ in every country where they had been published.

He felt a great load on him to give to the world his book on *Visions*. He wrote to me that by his publication 'a great burden will be removed from my heart, and it will indeed be a great relief.' He had been advised to postpone its publication till 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.'

During these years a great deal of controversy had been going on about the Sadhu, and about his visions. Criticism was especially fierce in Germany, but in India as well there were certain missionaries, and a number of Indians, who lost no opportunity to discredit him. It was said that he was an impostor who had never been to Tibet; that his reputed experiences of divine help were all figments of his brain; and that his visions were the imaginings of a diseased mind. It was said that he never fasted at Kajili Ban and that he had misappropriated money given for a school in Tibet to buy a bungalow for himself at Subathu. A Roman Catholic priest at Darjeeling, a Protestant Missionary Society in Switzerland were an ill-assorted team in seeking to prove him false. Sundar Singh felt these criticisms of himself and of his sincerity very deeply, but his attitude was that they were trials sent to test him, and God in his own good time would manifest the truth and vindicate him. When I told him that I had made an entry in my diary of 1913 of his visit to me in Nahan after his fast, he was immensely thankful to know of it as it proved, at least, that he had been near Kajili Ban at the time of the fast. He looked on his visions as his most intimate personal experience. They were much too precious for him to allow them to be made the subject of public discussions.

It is curious that members of the Roman Catholic Church adopted two diverse attitudes towards the Sadhu. One was that it was unthinkable that one could have such visions and experiences unless he were within the Roman Church, therefore they sought to prove him false. The other view admitted that he was one of the long line of saints to whom visions had been given, but they felt that he must be won back to the Church, therefore they tried all kinds of inducements to get him to put himself in the Catholic fold.

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 gave him a special call and used him in South India, and in Eastern and Western countries. We know that he did visit Tibet very frequently; that he did fast to the limits of his strength near Haridwar; we know that his visions were no hallucinations, but real unveilings of unseen mysteries. We know that he was sane, level-headed and shrewd in his judgments, and was in no way dominated by gusts of sentiment. To him the presence of the Living Lord was very real, and the joy of the Living Christ Jesus was very real, and the joy of the Presence dwarfed every other human joy.

From the Sadhu's Mail

The last seven years of Sundar Sing's life were less spectacular, but no less successful for the Kingdom of God, than were his earlier years. During the cold weather he used to travel far and wide throughout India to speak at conventions held for the deepening of spiritual life. At these he was always an acceptable speaker. After such meetings the people, after the Indian manner, would sit for hours to pay him their respects, and to glean some further word of spiritual help from his talk.

When his books were published, and when books about him went out into the wider world, there was a great return in lives brought nearer to the Lord, and in that surrender of self to God that we call conversion.

In letters to him many tell of the help he had been to them. Out of many I take the following:

A member of the Provincial Legislative Assembly in Canada writes that he had drifted into sin and worldliness, and had lost contact with God. Without peace, life became a nightmare to him, for he felt that he was forsaken of God. Then he read Canon Streeter and Dr. Appasamy's book *The Sadhu*, and the example of the Indian boy bearing the Cross made such an appeal to him that shortly after he yielded himself to Christ.

A young man in Paris read the Armenian translation of the life of Sundar Singh, and realized that there is a spiritual life to be lived. He yielded himself to Christ and became the possessor of that life.

A Japanese pastor purchased a book on the Sadhu's life and teaching. He writes: 'God used this book and has given great blessing in these six months.'

An aged invalid Irish lady, who could never admit that Jesus was divine, read Professor Heiler's book on the Sadhu and writes:

'I was soon convinced that I was wrong. I will not attempt to tell you what your book has done for me, but I do know that Jesus is divine.' A year later she wrote: 'You were the first who taught me to pray... and I have proved for myself the truth of your statement. He does give one strength and joy and peace. Now I could not live a day without Him.'

The late Archbishop Söderblom of Uppsala, Sweden wrote:

'God has given His whole Church a wonderful blessing through you — His faithful servant in faith and love. It would be to me one of the greatest boons of my life, if I might meet you personally once more. But even in distance I feel your acquaintance helpful, exhorting and strengthening... In everlasting thankfulness to God for what He has given me, and to His Church through you.'



Sundar with Bishop Söderblom in Sweden

Professor Heiler of Germany wrote:

‘Many hundreds of men have had great blessing from reading my books on you.’ Again he says referring to *Visions*: ‘Your book has impressed me deeply and helped me in my spiritual life. Thousands of people have found this little book is a pearl. We hear that every day.’

A lady in Switzerland writing of his books says:

‘Each time I come in contact with you, you bring me nearer to God. You help me to understand the reality of the invisible and the necessity of prayer which means being with God in Jesus.’

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The Last Journey

During his last years at Subathu the Sadhu always had a burning desire to go again to Tibet, but ill health made it impossible. He wrote to me at various times in 1926: 'I want once more to go to Tibet.' 'Now my prayer is that God will allow me to go to Tibet once more.' 'Tibet does not seem possible on account of attacks of pain. I am praying (perhaps a little obstinate) that God may grant me to go to Tibet.'

In April 1927, he started from Rishikesh with some Tibetan traders, intending to cross the Niti Pass into Tibet, but when only forty miles up the road, he had a very severe haemorrhage from the stomach, and was carried back by the Tibetans to the railway in a semi conscious condition. The following year he planned to go, but was delayed, waiting for his Tibetan trader friends, till the season was too late. Next spring he again made ready to go, and on April 18th 1929, having been called by a Tibetan trader to meet him at Rishikesh, he started out from Subathu. He wrote me that day: 'I am leaving today for Tibet, fully aware of the dangers and difficulties of the journey, but I must do my best to do my duty. But then 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 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 there.'

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 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.

When June passed, and the middle of July, without any word having reached me, I felt that we owed it to the Indian Church that something should be done to get news of him. So at the end of July, Dr. John C. Taylor of the Reformed Presbyterian Mission, and I left Landour to follow his route up the hot Ganges Valley. We went back two hundred and twenty miles into the main range of the Himalayas, as far as the Tibetan border.

We travelled with two mules for our food and bedding, and we had a third one which we rode by turns. At one stage we rode a pony. On the outer edge of the cliff roads, there were usually a few tufts of grass that were soft for the pony's feet. Do what we would, we could not keep him off that soft edge. He bore out against the pull of the bridle, and we had the not very satisfying knowledge that

there was only another inch between us and a drop that was often five hundred feet down. The reins would not steer that horse. At last I remembered that in Tibet the people ride with only a single rein. When I dropped one rein and gave his mouth a touch he went right, and when I pressed his neck with the rein he went left. He was a Tibetan pony and had been trained that way.

When it came to riding the mule it was worse. He had never had a bit in his mouth in his life and didn't know what to do about it. At first when I tried to steer him away from the cliff edge, he contended with me with the inherited stubbornness that his race can turn on. I pulled, and he pulled, and we reached the edge with his neck hauled round to right angles to his body, but with him still making ground outwards. I knew that he would win in the end, and nearly always jumped so as not to be associated with him in his suicide. There was nothing over the edge that attracted me. Again I had to think the thoughts of a mule, before I got even with him. I dropped both reins and every time he made for the edge, I bumped his head with a khud-stick (alpenstock). He was a quick learner, but before that I had some bad scares.

'The Pilgrim Line,' up which we went as far as Joshimath, is a well kept, well graded hill road. Along it in April, May and June fifty thousand Hindu pilgrims make their toilsome way as they go in for a hundred and seventy miles to one of the sources of the Ganges, to seek a *darshan*, or appearance of the god, in the temple at Badrinath, and a plunge in the ice-cold glacier water of the source. Their hope is that in the holy, undefiled water of 'Mother Ganges' the accumulation of the sins of their present birth will be washed away. That rocky road might be called 'The Barefoot Way' for the Brahman hierarchy have decreed, that any pilgrim defiling the holy way with leather shoes will lose the merit of his pilgrimage.

Beyond Josimath we turned on to the narrow trade road that follows the Dhaulī Ganga river through the main Himalayan Range, and on into Tibet. A few miles along we had to unload the mules and carry the loads over some bad slips. This delayed us, and darkness found us still on the road with a mile and a half of mountain-side track still to go. As we felt our way along in pitch darkness it seemed to be five miles before we reached the disused school at the hot spring at Tapoban. We camped there with a none-too-sweet group of hill men, who were going up to bring back wool from their sheep which were being grazed over in Tibet. We rested there over Sunday, and, as the mules could go no further, we took on three coolies. Next morning one of the coolies had fever, and it was mid-day before we got a substitute. It was well that we had that delay, for that evening we reached a stream that had been bridged with pine poles only half an hour before we arrived. Without a bridge we could not have crossed, for in the afternoons, when the heat melts the glacier snows, the force of the rush of water brings great stones pounding down along the stream's bottom, and puts fording out of the question.

Next day the road ran up and down steep cliff sides; sometimes a wall of stones carried it round a point; sometimes a shelf of pine logs, faced with slabs of rock, spanned a gap; sometimes it was a long flight of stone stairs, and again it was a rock cutting. At times it was over a thousand feet up a sheer face, and again it was downward, even splashed by the Dhaulī Ganga waters. It was a wonderful piece of rough engineering that generations of traders, by hit or miss methods, had built up.

At midday we met a caravan of sheep and goats packing salt and wool down the road from Tibet. Each animal carries from ten to thirty pounds, and, as they are fitted with breast-band and breeching, they are able to get over some very broken country. The men had just completed a rough footbridge over a side stream so we were able to go on without delay. A few days after this, a man crossing this bridge was washed away by a sudden rush of water and drowned. The packmen reported trouble

ahead. Two bridges had been washed away, and a hundred and fifty sheep and goat packmen from Tibet had been held up for ten days. When we arrived in the afternoon, we found that the first bridge that crossed a side stream had just been replaced, but on crossing we found that the bridge over the Dhaulī Ganga river was only half completed. Across a span of fifty feet, with a roaring cataract below, pine logs had been thrown there, but it was a long span and the logs were neither supported below nor were their ends fixed. There was a foot of open space between each, and they rolled under our feet, and bobbed up and down deliriously. With set teeth, we unsteadily picked our steps across. One of the hillman coolies could not face it with a load, but crawled over on his hands and knees.

Beyond that we passed some cliff roads and came to Bothia, a village of Malari set on the edge of an open alluvial flat, that had once been a lake bed. It is peopled by Marchas, a progressive and prosperous people who trade between India and Tibet. While sitting in the village, we watched the methods of some wandering fore-tellers of coming events. A man began beating a small drum, while two women danced round. At first, the measure was slow, but as the tempo increased the women whirled faster and faster till one of them dropped unconscious, and began to speak as one hypnotized. In that state her utterances were supposed to be those of an oracle.

Higher up we passed through an open glacier valley and reached Bampa in heavy rain and were glad to find shelter in a very leaky house. In the morning we went through a wild gorge. We were at 13,000 feet in the gorge and the mountains still stood 7,000 feet almost straight above us. At Niti where we camped for the night, a market for Tibetan traders is usually held at this time, but this year it was being held across the border. That night the rain fell steadily and a good deal of it was mixed with snow.

We managed to hire two Bhotia ponies, and dressed in all that we had, set out on the eight mile climb to the top of the Bara Hoti pass on the border of Tibet. Beyond that we could not go, as we had given our promise to the District Officer, that we would not cross into the Forbidden Land.

We started before daylight and soon reached a landslide on a wet and slippery hillside that had only a goat track across. I went forward to see if it was safe for the ponies to cross. There was a big drop below, and as I turned to get back I took hold of stone in the rotten rock of the bank. It came away in my hand, and that upset my sense of balance. Giddiness came on and I had an uncomfortable struggle to keep hold of myself, while with all sense of balance upset, I made myself go back to a wider bit of the road. Some Tibetan shepherds camped nearby, said the ponies could cross all right. So, with one man hauling the pony's head inwards by the reins, and another holding it in by the tail, and me clutching the last man's collar, we got across. It gave us confidence in the surefootedness of Bhotia ponies — and we needed all of it before the day was out.

We climbed steadily between two walls of rugged cliffs for four miles. There we came on three men cowering over a poor fire of green juniper wood. Their teeth were chattering, and they were shaking violently. They said that they were perished with the cold as they had been out in the rain and snow all night.

By this time we were up to the limit above which vegetation will not grow, and the track became a steep scramble, first over bare moraine rocks, then over patches of snow, and finally over four inches of snow that had fallen in the night. On that grade, and at that height, the ponies could hardly get their breath and had to stop every five yards to blow. The light at times was dazzling, and all round us were a score of naked peaks with wide glacier fields. Unfortunately mist came down, and when we reached the top of the pass, we could not see the Tibet side at all. The Bhotias had warned us about the fearful cold of the blizzards that blow after midday every day. Even when wrapped in their sheepskin coats

they could not endure it. We were then at 18,000 feet, and it was not comfortable. The glare had given us headaches, and the cold and breathlessness had made our whole bodies sore. It was a place to get out of, so we left it to the shrine of the pass with its fluttering rags, and to the solitary Tibetan raven sending his weird cry out of the mist.

Below us a caravan of sheep, goats, yaks and ponies were being hurried along so that they would get over the top before the blizzard began. Their leader told me that on their crossing the previous month, six of his men had perished in the intense cold.

Next day, we started back. For the return journey we had on the whole a down grade and the going was easier. Dr. Taylor had trouble with his eyes. The glare on the snow had given him a nasty touch of snow blindness, which was painful for several days. During the days, we had not had much rain, but the people said it had been the wettest week they had known for ten years. We soon ran into the consequences of it, in roads that had fallen into the river, and in bridges that had been washed away. The first bridge was the one on the poles of which we had crossed a week previously. A few hours after we had got over, a sudden spate in the side stream below had brought down enormous blocks of rock and landed them in the Dhauli. They were big enough to form a considerable dam, causing the water of the river to back up quietly and before anyone had time to cross, carried away the bridge and two thousand rupees worth of very hard-won salt, which they had deposited at the bridge-head to be ready for a quick crossing.

As the bridge was one of two by which the road crossed above and below a high cliff, we had to keep to one bank and make it by a bad scramble round the cliff face, but it was a giddy climb. The hillmen spoke of it with respect as a bad thing in the way of climbs. We went up broad slabs of smooth rock that tilted upwards and sloped outwards towards the river below. Then we got down clefts like chimneys on to the next set of slabs, then through more chimneys and over shingle screes and rock face where we had only a bit here and there to hang on while two hundred feet below, the hungry river kept up its roar.

Next day was Sunday and we had a glorious rest in a pretty camp. The following morning we crossed on a pack sheep bridge that had been newly put up, and in the next two miles had to scramble over many slips of rock and rubble. Lower down we came on some very dispirited shepherds. Their sheep had eaten out the grass and they were short of food. The bridge three miles below was gone and the cliff road in between had dropped into the river. One of their men had been drowned, and they did not see how they were to get out of it. Away below where they were, a rough cantilever bridge of logs spanned the river. They said that they had heard that there was a way round the cliffs on the other side but none of them knew it. We said we would give it a go, and crossed over to see if we could make it. In that part, the Dhauli river runs through an immense fault with sheer precipices on each side where each ridge has been shorn in two. As a road, it did not promise much to anyone. I asked a *Pradhan* or headman of a small village on that side if there was a way. 'Yes', he said, 'but I won't be responsible for anyone who goes on it. My men never go that way, and I won't send them anyway.' I asked if the cliffs above, that we had lately crossed, were as bad. 'No', he said, 'those are nothing at all.'

The first climb was up two thousand feet of sheer cliff with little to hang on to and a long way to drop, but we managed it with only one or two bad moments of dizziness when we had to set our teeth and force ourselves in to a controlled frame of mind, before we could trust ourselves to move. At the top we got through bush on the back slope of the next hill in which there were tracks of bears everywhere. Next we had to crawl down the rock-face of the second ridge to get back into the valley and so round the foot of the next cliff.

It was a thousand feet down, and that was a much worse proposition than two thousand feet up. After a mile through rank grass along the river we had to go up another two thousand foot hill. This time it was mostly grass but very steep. On its far side we found a fifteen inch ledge that led us for three hundred yards round three bluffs. At almost any point of that three hundred yards, we could have dropped a stone straight down two thousand feet on to the valley floor below. By that time I was tired — so tired that my imagination was dead and the dizzy ledge upset me not at all. From there two miles of mountain track took us down to the crossing of a side stream, but when we arrived at dark we found that the bridge there had also been washed away. We slept under a cliff, with some others who had been held up. Next morning we were out at daylight. On the stones of the river-bed in front was a thin pine log thirty-feet long. The battering it had received coming down the stream had stripped off all its roots and branches. There was not a log like it, in any of the streams round. We all got hold of it, put the thin end between two rocks in the stream and rammed it against the opposite cliff. Then we ran a life line over and in two minutes were all across.

Further down the road, we had a stiff scramble over a rocky point to get past a break in the road. At another place where the road had broken away, we were able to cross the fifteen foot gap above the swirling water on a thin pine sapling.

We found our mules fat and flourishing after their ten days rest in the long grass of Tapovan, and, doing double and sometimes treble marches, arrived back in Landour twenty-eight days after we had set out, having covered four hundred miles of wild mountain road in that time.

Our experience gave us an understanding of the difficulties the Sadhu had faced year after year, as he had crossed that mountain barrier to take the Gospel to that remote land. It was no easy hot weather trip. The long hot marches in the deep through of the Ganges valley; the cholera that is almost always associated with pilgrim crowds; the dangerous stream crossings; the sheer precipices with their frequent falls of rock; roads broken and washed away; the breathlessness of altitude climbing, with snow-blindness and icy winds of high snow passes, are all incidents of those who venture on that way.

We found no evidence of the Sadhu having passed along that road, though it was the route he had given me. What happened then? At Srinagar, seventy-five miles up the road from Rishikesh, lived a Christian preacher who was an old friend of the Sadhu. His house was within fifty yards of the only road along which the Sadhu could have gone. But he did not call there. What then? All along the Ganges Valley in May and June there had been a serious epidemic of cholera. Many of the pilgrims who that year went to bathe at Badrinath died in it. The bodies were thrown into Mother Ganges, so that purified by her sacred waters their souls might be carried to bliss in the heaven of the particular god whose followers they were. Did the Sadhu go out with them? It is possible. No individual records of death can be kept of that pilgrim crowd, many of whom are nameless sadhus. We can only surmise that the Sadhu received the call he was expecting, either through his own bodily weakness, or through the dread cholera. Had he passed through the Bhotia villages beyond the 'Pilgrim Line' from Joshimath on, he could easily have been traced, for few go that way and all who go through in a year are remembered by the people. We concluded that the call he longed for, came to him in the earlier stages of that journey, and that once more the heavens were opened for him to enter in and this time to abide in the rapture of the presence of his Lord.

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The Sadhu we Knew

When Sher Singh, the Sadhu's father died, he left a share of his land to the Sadhu, and also a sum of money, but, though Sundar Singh had all the Sikh shrewdness in money matters, he was so little interested in it, that it was three months after his father's death before he troubled to enquire about it. He then gave his share in the land to his brother, and with the money left to him, he bought for his own use the old mission bungalow in Subathu.

Royalties paid for the publication of his books in time amounted to a considerable sum. This he invested in Government securities and scrupulously set the sum aside for the Lord's work. In 1925 he drew up a will by which the whole of his property and funds were to be used for training and supporting preachers for work in Tibet and the Hill States, for prizes for Bible Knowledge, for scholarships for poor Christian boys of marked ability, and for scholarships to help tried and faithful preachers to take a theological course.

In the absence of direct evidence of the Sadhu's death, the executors petitioned the Court that his death might be presumed, and in 1932 the Court granted the petition and gave probate of the will. Since that time interest from the funds invested in Government securities has helped many boys, girls and preachers to be better equipped for their life's work.

More than any man we have met, Sundar Singh might have said: 'To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.' He saw the heavenly vision and was not disobedient to it. In following, in hunger and cold and nakedness he learned the joy of sharing in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. The sadhu way that he took, was the way of renunciation, but it lifted him above the trivial things of life and brought him into the abiding joy and peace of his Lord. At the last a new standard of comparison was set for him, when he saw the wounds of the glorified body of our Lord. It seized his whole mind and heart so that he weighed hunger, thirst, neglect, criticisms and trials of every kind against the price paid by his Lord in suffering. This thought lifted him into a region of calm detachment where his troubles faded away in the light of infinite suffering, and gave him that calm of spirit that was an outstanding attribute of Christ on earth.

The Sadhu was a lovable soul. He was always humble and simple. The success of his tours and his world-fame did not spoil him at all. He had a keen sense of humour and loved a joke. Usually he spoke only when he was spoken to, but he was a good conversationalist. He thought in pictures, and, as he described them, his speech was clear and vivid. He read widely in books of a philosophical nature, especially during his last years, as the well-marked volumes of his library showed.

He was always amazed that God had called him to fame and honour, but his success and his pleasure in the fellowship of kindred minds were all as nothing compared with the joy of meeting with his Lord. In the midst of the gayest conversation, he would quietly excuse himself and retire to his

appointment with his Lord. He was up a daylight and began the day refreshed in soul, and with his sense of proportion set right by study of God's Word and communion with the Living God.

To what can we attribute the world-wide acceptance of Sundar Singh as a man of God? He was only a village boy. His education was meagre, and he was alone in the world, yet before he was thirty he was known and honoured in the Christian part of the world. Whether in the homes of the poor or in the palaces of the great, he was always self-possessed and natural. It did not flurry him to have to meet with princes of either Church or State. Children had no fear of him. Whether in India, China or England they often thought of him as Jesus. Without doubt the long robe produced part of this impression, but most of it came from the calm peace of his face. He loved little children.

His judgement of men and things was good. He had that intuition which reads the minds of men and of great crowds. He instantly sensed the weak point in the intellectualism of some foreign sceptic, and some apt illustration sprang ready to his lips with which to back his opinion. He did not argue.

He was independent in his thinking and in his decisions. He brought every theory to the test of his experience of God, revealed in Jesus Christ. In Christ he had found God. In the glorified risen Lord he found fellowship, guidance and abundant joy and peace. He could accept nothing that explained away the reality of those vital experiences. By immediate illumination from God, he reached the truth in a more direct way than through the pieced-together logic of the intellectual. This gave him certainty, so he went his own way confident that his Gospel was not after man, but by revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11). He believed that it was with him as it had been with Paul who said: 'It pleased God... to reveal His Son to me,' (Gal. 1:15-16).

His humbleness of mind was very noticeable. Although the world had run to meet him, he came back to Subathu the same humble servant of Christ as he had been when he set out. His contacts with leading men and big movements, made him a bigger man in the eyes of the world and gave him a wider outlook, but he was never lifted up by pride, and continued to live always in humble obedience to his Lord.

These qualities, together with his pleasing personality, his humour, his freshness as a speaker and the record of his adventurous life, were not in themselves sufficient to account for his popularity. In addition to all these qualities the most important source of his power was his prayer-life. He began each day with about two hours of prayer, meditation and Bible-study and he lived in the spirit of prayer throughout the day.

Prayer for him was not a request for definite earthly blessings, nor even a request for spiritual blessings. It was not an attempt to change the mind of God. 'The desire for God Himself', says the Sadhu, 'is the only really worthwhile prayer.'

'Through prayer and only by the simple method of prayer, we become aware of Christ's presence and learn to know Him. You must go into the stillness and pray to Christ in solitude; there you will hear the voice of Him, who alone can help you. If you read His Word and pray to Him for only half an hour each day, you will have the same experience. He will reveal Himself to you in prayer; then you will know Him as He is. He will not only reveal Himself to you, but He will come and give you strength and joy and peace.'

In his various addresses he explains what prayer is:

‘The essence of prayer does not consist in asking God for something but in opening our hearts to God, in speaking to Him, in living with Him in perpetual communion. Prayer is continual abandonment to God... Prayer does not mean asking God for all kinds of things we want; it is rather the desire for God Himself, the only Giver of life... Prayer is not asking but union with God... Prayer is not a painful effort to gain from God help in the varying needs of our lives. Prayer is desire to possess God Himself, the Source of all life... The true spirit of prayer does not consist in asking for blessings, but in receiving Him who is the Giver of all blessing, and in living a life in fellowship with Him... Prayer is not a kind of begging for favours, it is rather breathing and living in God.’

People came to his meetings in great numbers because they were anxious to see a man to whom had been given the mystic vision of the Spiritual World. He never directly mentioned his visions in his addresses, but in them he was often describing scenes he had witnessed, and repeating things he had heard, and as he vividly described these things, his words took on a clearness and authority which people instinctively recognised to be of God.

He was at all times conscious of God, but at times he had such an overwhelmingly vivid sense of His nearness that it brought a joy to him that lifted him above adverse conditions, and, though he was without a music sense, made him express his joy in song. His experiences of vision brought the same uplifting joy. They took him far into the ‘ben’² at the home of God and into the presence of Jesus his Lord. Sometimes when he told a friend of what he had seen in that world, excitement would grip him and make his face shine and his voice thrill with the deep emotion of it.

He used to say: ‘The gift of ecstasy which God has given me, is more precious than any earthly home could be. In it I find a joy so wonderful that it transcends all others. I would not exchange this gift for the whole world.’

Peace and joy came to him not only during the ecstasy of his visions. They were the normal condition of his life. Professor Heiler says:

‘To Sundar Singh this heavenly peace is the central miracle of his life, and not only his life, it is the central miracle of Christianity, the proof of the truth of the Gospel. It is the fulfilment of the deepest longing that God has put into the heart of man. “Peace of heart,” he says, “is the greatest miracle in the world. We find this peace only in Christ. He has created our heart for peace; therefore it can only be at rest when it has found it.” ’

‘For Sundar Singh the whole mystery and wonder of the Christian life consists in the fact that “life in heaven” begins upon this earth — that eternal blessedness begins in time. This is the mystery; that here on earth we begin to live in heaven, because we live with our Saviour. For the Sadhu, Christianity is not so much a religion which consists in the promise of heaven, but rather he views heaven as a present possession.’

Sadhu Sundar Singh’s life of faith was real and satisfying. He lived in the conscious presence of his Lord. In his overseas tours, he met with princes and lived with the great. His meetings were attended by thousands. He was a wonder to all, and moved in a great spotlight beam of publicity. To him was given the reverential regard of great crowds. All this was interesting to him and he liked it, but the

² ‘ben’: inner or back room

rush of it all encroached on his times of meditation. He felt shut out from his Lord, and, as soon as possible he sought again the hard way of the Himalayan roads; where there was hunger and cold, danger and weariness but there his Lord walked with him, and that gift out priced all that the world's popularity could give. There the peace of God beyond all understanding was his.

What a witness the Sadhu has left for the Church in India and for the Church throughout the world! He chose the way of humble obedience to the will of God as revealed in Christ. It led him into much suffering and trial, but in it he found the joy and peace of his Lord. It taught him, that heaven is not a dim far-off hope. It is a present reality for all who become 'partakers of the divine nature.' In the practice of prayer, meditation and obedience to God's will, the Sadhu found joy and peace of heart. For every seeker of God, Sundar Singh has marked out a royal road.

About the Author

Thomas Ewart Riddle was born in August 1876 in New Zealand. He was the son of Rev. P.J. Riddle from Scotland. His early education was at the High Schools in Christchurch and Ashburton and later at Canterbury University and Otago University. He was a student of the Northern Presbyterian Church, studying extra-murally while undertaking Home Missionary work.

After studying Arts in New Zealand he went in September 1900 to Edinburgh for theological studies, at New College. He joined the Pleasance Mission in Edinburgh and acted as an Assistant to a City Church for 6 months. Later he was appointed warden of the New College and gained experience in slum work. He returned to New Zealand in August 1902.

He was invited to go to New Hebrides (Vanuatu) as successor to Rev T. Smail at the island of Epi. Riddle was ordained as a missionary in March 1903 and went to Epi in the New Hebrides. He translated the Gospel of Matthew & Galatians into the Nikoura language. Owing to decreasing population on Epi he resigned from the work in 1911 to go to India where the field and need was very great. In November 1911 he returned to New Zealand and left for India in December the same year.

During WW1 he joined the Indian Expeditionary Force as a YMCA Chaplain, and he left Bombay with a contingent of them in October 1914 to join the Force in France. In August 1915 he fell seriously ill with cerebral-meningitis in Marseilles and spent 10 months in hospital. When he recovered he returned as Hospital Chaplain in France. In November 1915 he left France for Mudros in Egypt, and after some time there he went to Mesopotamia. After a period there he joined the Lancers at Peshawar. He joined up with the Indian Cavalry and rose to the post of Commander of a Squadron, retiring at the close of the war with the rank of Captain. As soon as he was released from military service in February 1919, he returned to Jagadhri in India and took charge of the evangelistic work there and from 1923 in the Kharar District. He married in March 1917 Miss Isobel Milne, a Missionary Nurse in Jagadhri.

Rev. Riddle had the distinction of being a very close friend of the late Indian Evangelist Sadhu Sundar Singh. In company with Dr. J.C. Taylor of the American Presbyterian Mission, they went in July-August 1929 on a perilous journey of 228 miles over 28 hazardous and adventurous days towards Tibet searching for the Sadhu after his mysterious disappearance.

Although no trace was found of the Sadhu, Rev. Riddle believed he died during a cholera epidemic that swept away many pilgrims along the Ganges valley at that time with the bodies being thrown into the river.

Rev. Riddle retired in January 1947 and with his wife returned to New Zealand. An autobiography '*The light of other days*' was published in 1949. Rev. Riddle died in January 1967.