

FROM THE EDITOR

A FACT OF PROGRESS

We receive numerous letters. Some of them are meant for publication, to let our readers share the ideas or reflections of the letter-writers. Others are comments or congratulations meant for the benefit of the editor and the publisher. There are some which obviously the writers write in a personal way. We are not sure whether they intend the content to be published or not.

Here is a few words from a school girl's letter: "THE HERITAGE is my best friend and teacher. When I say teacher, I mean it. I learn not only the ideas and information it contains, but also, through the help of a dictionary, the difficult words and phrases used in it...I know that THE HERITAGE wants us to cultivate decent values. I know very well that there are good values and bad values. But I am afraid, they are often mixed up...How to differentiate between them is my problem."

Indeed, it is her problem and it is everybody's problem. But it is obvious from her letter that she has the power of discrimination. The other day a smaller child was heard commenting (on a film): "The story was good, but why didn't they turn the camera elsewhere when....? That poor boy and his girl friend must have felt awfully embarrassed!" It was the need of brute realism to disillusion the child about the nature of "that poor boy and her girl friend", that they were not made of the stuff to feel embarrassed, but the statement reveals the child's sense of discrimination between the aesthetic and the unaesthetic though the two things remained mixed.

Our judgement on what is good value and what is not will be arbitrary, orthodox and reactionary unless we realised that the evolutionary nisus in us is leading us in a certain direction, from darkness to light and from falsehood to truth. Through the vicissitudes of life (perhaps through many lives) we learn that in the ultimate analysis it pays to be on the side of light and truth. Many of our time-bound ideas, our life-style, will keep changing, but this is a factor that defies change.

Once we have realised this, we know what are the values which are helpful in our natural progress and what are the values which check us. Fortunately, we have that power of discrimination inherent in us. We know what arouses in us a sense of delight and what gives us mere momentary pleasure, that too not without a sense of futility.

It is not possible for us to kill this sense of discrimination in our consciousness, but perhaps we can give it enough blows to throw it into a coma. That is what we should not do. And we must not be fooled by deceptions. It is the tendency of wrong values to masquerade as the right values. We do not keep a check on our ego and arrogance wearing the mask of our love for religion and making communal hooligans and murderers of us; we do not remember when the anarchy in us vaunts itself as our love for freedom and democracy.

Indeed, we have to grow through errors—and errors will bring unhappy consequences in their trail—but much of the errors can certainly be avoided if we do not forget the essential fact of our progress—the direction of the evolutionary nisus.

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

HIS MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE

We had never met, but naturally I knew him through his writing when I was in the High School and he, as he wrote to me years later, knew me through our common friends.

In 1983 K.A. Abbas wrote to me from a hospital in Bombay that he was already old and incapable of much movement. Although he would like to visit Pondicherry and Madras he was doubtful of his capacity to do so and hence he did not know if we could ever meet.

But we met when I was in Bombay soon thereafter. His house was sandwiched between a hotel and some shops and it was full of noise. "I moved here a quarter-century ago. As evening would set in. I would be afraid of the total desolation that too would set in along with the sunset. Now I'm afraid of the throngs all around, of the street-brawls among the rowdies and the drunk. I could not have dreamt of such a situation coming to prevail in this area."

One of the first things we decided to do when planning THE HERITAGE is to obtain from Mr. Abbas the right to abridge his unique work, *And One Did Not Come Back*—the story of Dr. Kotnis and the Indian Medical Mission working during the turbulent times in China. Luckily, the sole surviving member of the mission, Dr. B.K. Basu (the man who brought acupuncture to India) opened to us his albums of the invaluable pictures of those days.

But the problem that faced us was unexpected. No copy of the book—once so popular—was to be found in Abbas Sahib's possession. He had advertised in a popular weekly that one who can give him a copy of it would get copies of all his other works in exchange. At last we got a copy and we published its abridged version, with an evocative picture drawn by our art-consultant Sisir Datta and rare pictures given by Dr. Basu, in our March '85 number. "The abridgement has been very well-done for which you deserve my congratulations and also thanks," wrote Abbas Sahib on 5 March '85.

He had written to me earlier, "... when I related the story to Mr. Shantaram, he took it to be imaginary story for which he congratulated me. When he knew that it was based on facts, he was all the more thrilled and undertook to play the part of the real-life Dr. Kotnis." (For the famous movie of those days "Dr, Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani".)

In course of our conversation K.A. Abbas narrated to me what he considered to be the greatest of tribute he had received from his readers:

"I was in Moscow in connection with the production of *Pardesi*, the Indo-Russian joint venture. I was in the 13th floor of the hotel. I told the young lady running the lift, Thirteenth'. She controlled the lift while reading a book. I saw that the lift crossed my floor. But I waited with patience. She opened the door for me at the 30th floor. I smiled and told her that my destination was the thirteenth floor. She was embarrassed. 'Pardon me, at fault is this immensely absorbing book!'

I leaned and saw the title. It was the Russian translation of one of my novels. I did not tell her that I was its author, but that was the most memorable moment in my life as a writer."

"You should not have deprived her of what could have become the most memorable moment in her life as a reader! You should have whispered to her your identity!" I commented.

"Of course she came to know me afterwards."

Abbas Sahib sent a story to THE HERITAGE which, while being illustrated by our artist, was found to have been published in another magazine. I conveyed my unpleasant surprise to him. But this is how he made up: "I got a shock when I discovered my unexcusable BLUNDER which occurred I do not know how. Perhaps not getting an acceptance letter which could have prevented it. Anyway, it is my mistake and I admit it and apologise for the same. I am sending you a BRAND new story, *The Rain Machine*."

This was the humility of this celebrated writer, columnist, film-maker and thinker.

The next day he was being admitted to the hospital once again—he informed me. Thereafter he had to shuttle between home and the hospital till the end came on the 1st of June.

THE UNKNOWN ASHOKA

We had announced that we will carry an article on little-known legends about Emperor Ashoka by Pradip Bhattacharya in this issue. The article was to be published in two parts in two issues. Instead, we decided to present the complete article as a book feature in our September issue. The feature will not only make absorbing reading, but also, when all the legends are read together, will give us some rare glimpses of men and matters as they stood more than two thousand years ago.