

(written at Hyderabad, December 4, 1946 ).

Dear Mr. Rogers:

In Madras on my return from the south, I received a batch of mail forwarded by Phil from New Delhi, including your cable querying about letter No. 3, and your welcome letter mentioning that you and Miss Leland had lunch with my family in Hanover. I was glad to learn that your western trip has been successfully completed and that your plans are developing. We'll be interested to receive news of your progress when your memorandum is completed.

Tonight, although I've had a formidable circuit tour of South India, I'm not going to write about a procession of villages and towns or a galaxy of interviews. There is a hopeful institution in India's modern life, the charity school, which has come before me through the happy smiles of children and the gentle eyes of patient teachers. I'm partial to children, so it is of them and their gurus that I wish to write.

Let us start in Mayanoor, a Tamil village in Madras Province. One mile from the main settlement of this ancient river village is the separate quarter for the "untouchable", or Harijan community. The two or three most fortunate Harijan families may own an acre or two of paddy land, but most are laborers dependent on daily wages or on a share of the harvest twice a year. They know no craft, and after seeing the conditions of their abodes it is superfluous to take statistics of their incomes. In contrast to the dryer streets and brick buildings of the parent hamlet, the Harijans live in a muddy hollow in damp, wilted huts of thatch and earth. When they applied to the village committee for funds with which to improve their well and build streets with proper drains, they were refused. Among the people, the condition of the old women is particularly appalling, but one wonders first about the future of the naked sniffing children who cluster around; and especially about the tiny sleeping baby clutched firmly to the side of her three-year old sister. This is the future generation of India: what is being done for it ?

Twelve years ago in Mayanoor, Sri K. G. Sivaswamy and Sri Sambasivam, two kindly men dressed in homespun, handwoven white khadi cloth, the symbol of their devotion to Gandhi's nationalist movement, opened a small school. Their aim was to produce village leaders, boys who would not only learn some practical handicrafts, some fundamental agricultural rules, and the three R's, but would also be guided in cooperative living and civic uplift. Filled with the example and spirit of their selfless teachers, the boys would then return to their villages and try to lead the homefolk out of the slough of economic squalor and spiritual despondence. Nearby villages responded to the school and boys enrolled. But then word reached the Harijan community and they sent pupils. Here at once was the school's first crisis. Because the caste Hindus refused to attend with the Harijans, and because Gandhiji was teaching that Harijans must not be abused, the teachers were left with only "untouchable" pupils. This tragedy immediately broke the original purpose of the school. It is the caste Hindus who most need the gospel of man's equality and cooperative life. Just as Negroes can not change overnight the white hearts that consider themselves

superior, so Harijans can not lead a village awakening. Though the school's graduates could return home with new abilities and fresh outlook, they could not become leaders as the program first contemplated. This was a bitter disappointment to the founders, but the Harijan school continued.

In 1941, Phil Talbot visited this school hostel and wrote in its guest book, " I hope that here preparation for life may never be subordinated to preparation for examinations. Having gone this far, may this not be the first step in filling India's first need, the providing of opportunity for her underprivileged boys ? " Phil's hope, and the teachers', was soon destined to be shattered again. With the war, dozens of new hand-loom weaving mills were opened in nearby towns. Having three years of training on the hand-loom, the Harijan graduates enthusiastically went to work in the mills. But soon other mill workers discovered their origin, and united in telling the proprietors that they would quit unless the Harijans were fired. Clearly the proprietor could not afford to lose the majority of his working force, so he had no choice. Furious as a gentle person can be when provoked to honest anger, Sri Sambasivam appealed to the District Collector. This official could not order the other mill workers to accept the Harijans, so was helpless to remove their social disability. He did enable Sambasivam to start a mill of his own, financed on a cooperative basis by less prejudiced local citizens. This enterprise is now a business success, and the boys now find employment there. But Sambasivam is discouraged. His boys are still not assimilated in society, and the village of Mayanoor itself has improved only slightly in its attitude towards the Harijans. It is only in the clean bright faces and active young bodies of his eager charges that he finds reward for his long efforts. And he has been assured by A. V. Thakkar, one of Gandhi's oldest and most devoted assistants, that the mere awakening and restoring of spirit to these boys is justification for the school's travails. Such encouragement from "Thakkar Bapa", one so near to Gandhiji, is like a treasure to Sambasivam. The program will continue. Perhaps with the current pressure for the removal of untouchability, it may eventually return to accomplish its original purpose.

This school is one of the projects of the Servants of India Society, a group of some thirty scholars and social workers who have pledged their lives to serve Indians regardless of race, religion, or caste, at a salary sufficient only for life's elementary needs. But there are other organizations, secular and religious, that are performing the same high task. I spent two days in the devout atmosphere of a Christian asram at Kottayam, in Travancore. The outside activities of the members of this asram have extended to famine and epidemic relief during 1943 and 1944 in the badly affected areas of Travancore. But their constant enterprise is the maintenance of a school for "street boys".

A word about street boys in India will serve to explain the need for such a program. At each town where we stopped in my bus rides in southwest India, three or four gaunt or maimed boys, and usually a stooped mother with a shrunken baby, approached us for charity. Because of famine and epidemics, these boys have been orphaned and have departed their small villages to seek life in the towns. In

most cases they will go on with this begging, occasionally when physically fit doing a bit of work, but essentially gamins, dependent on what the street yields them in coins or crumbs. It is from this corps of young humans that the Kristavasram draws its pupils. Perhaps an asram member may observe one on the street and enlist his sympathy and interest. Or one of the older students may persuade a street friend to join the school group. The new boy is taken into the hostel and the school family - but often the freedom of the street at first draws him back and he runs away. He usually comes back. K. K. Chandy, one of the young leading spirits of the asram, told me of one 14 year old Mohammedan boy, unusual in this Hindu-majority place, who ran away seven times during his first six months, then was won over and settled down to give earnest attention to his lessons, his Bible readings, and his crafts. During the war he joined the Army and kept in correspondence with Chandy. After two years' service, he finally wrote that he had become a Christian. He has now returned to the asram to give other handicapped boys the same help he received. Not all the students become Christians, but all who spend several years go out with a chance in life, with new human resources.

The government has not taken such boys out of the street, so the asram is accomplishing only a fraction of the need. But the restoration of these youths - replacing the habits of loose street life and instilling enthusiasm for the constructive "good life" - is a long task demanding endless patience and love. No teacher working merely for pay could endure such slow and trying progress. I'm sure I couldn't. The asram members are inspired and sustained by the spirit of God. During our prayer meetings at the asram and my long talks with the elderly Sadhu Mathai and Reverend John, my own spiritual searchings were given a new insight. But religion to me is a quiet and private affair. Deeply touched by the generous affection given me by these saintly men, and by their instinctive trust in me, I was nevertheless disturbed because I was not equal to that trust, in that I could not give myself honestly and fully to the frank discussions of their own philosophies and religious convictions. At a stage in my own spiritual growth which is neither very sure nor very vocal, I failed to meet the challenge of their frankness and their complete dedication to God. But I know that a longer stay in the company of such people will be of tremendous value to me. I plan to spend much more time in asrams before I leave India.

Neglected girls are also receiving attention in such schools. In Calicut I visited one of several orphanages started after the 1943 cholera epidemic by the Servants of India Society. Here some forty young girls were awaiting my visit, with flowers in their hair and wearing neat blue skirts and blouses made at a nearby craft school. They sat in rows on the floor and spun on their charkas for me, and then sang and danced together. The songs were about Mr. Nayanar, the school's founder, who recently died, and about Gandhiji. The dances were old Malabar folk numbers now being revived, and were gracefully performed with careful teamwork. I asked what was being done to prepare these girls for the harsh

world which they must enter when they grow up. I was told that the world's flaws would not be hidden from them during their eight years at the school, and that they would be given a craft or clerical skill to fit them for winning their livelihood. After meeting their matron, the widow of the school's founder, I was sure they were being well cared for. Her dark brown eyes, a bit pained and questioning after her recent loss, her black hair with streaks of ashen grey falling loosely to her shoulders, and her slight and quiet person seem to portray a silent dedication to the task of bringing these girls safely to womanhood, full of the lore and wisdom of her own gentle life.

I didn't think of trying to convey in words the spirit of these schools, and many others, until I reached a small village near Cape Comorin. There my host was Mr. Sivanpillai, a man of thirty-five, who has inherited a spirit of service from his father. The latter had required his eldest son, on completion of his medical training, to establish his practice in his own village, rather than moving to the more remunerative town. I found it a rare experience to visit a clean and modern dispensary in such a small village, as such contributors to society are still too uncommon. My own host had been a successful advocate, but last year he journeyed to Madras to see Gandhi. Inspired by the ideas of Gandhiji, he gave up his practice and now devotes his attention to Congress politics - and to a school which he has founded. Over the objection of her more conservative parents, he sent his wife to a training center where the Gandhian system of basic education is taught. Now she has her own young pupils.

In Wardha, tomorrow, I shall see the headquarters of this basic education scheme. At the home of Sivanpillai I saw an early demonstration of its results. There I was captured by a spontaneous outburst of gaiety and singing by seven and eight year old boys and girls, who had come to their teacher's house to see the American. Some sang with a serious determination of their own, while others paired off and sang exuberantly to each other. Too young to harmonize their music perfectly, too enthusiastic to curb its loudest and highest notes, they were a living demonstration of the wonder and fresh affection of young happy children. They had caught the infectious love of their pretty teacher and had carried it out of school hours. When they carry it on into life, what can they not teach us ?

In writing so lengthily about the qualities of these children and teachers, I do not pretend that these schools are a large feature of Indian life. But they are an encouraging sign, and their importance may be greater than their numbers would indicate. Furthermore, I have enjoyed writing about them, which is almost reason enough. I hope you'll bear with my longwindedness again, and I'll try to say more in less space in the future.

Sincerely yours,

*Richard Morse*