

APPENDIX

Letters on “Sri Aurobindo: A Life Sketch”

[1]

I understand from Ratikanto Nag that you have very nearly finished reading through my manuscript.

I have read through most of the MS. — but the narrative portion of the account of my life is full of inaccuracies of fact. I hope to write about this shortly. 1928

[2]

I do not know where you got the facts in your account of my life; but after starting to correct it I had to give up the attempt in despair. It is chock-full of errors and inaccuracies: this cannot be published. As for the account of my spiritual experience, I mean of the Bombay affair, somebody must have inflicted on you a humorous caricature of it. This too cannot go. The best will be to omit all account or narrative and say — at not too much length, I would suggest — what you think it necessary to say about me. 16 March 1930

[3]

I see that you have persisted in giving a biography — is it really necessary or useful? The attempt is bound to be a failure, because neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been on the surface for man to see.

You have given a sort of account of my political action, but the impression it makes on me and would make, I believe, on your public is that of a fiery idealist rushing furiously at an impossible aim (knocking his head against a stone wall, which is not a very sensible proceeding) without any grasp on realities

and without any intelligible political method or plan of action. The practical peoples of the West could hardly be well impressed by such a picture and it would make them suspect that, probably, my yoga was a thing of the same type! 25 March 1930

[4]

No, certainly not.¹ If you gave my name, it would be as if I were advertising myself in your book. I did not care to have anything of the kind written, as I told you, because I do not think these things are of any importance. I merely wrote, in the end, a brief summary of the most outward facts, nothing inward or personal, because I have seen that many legends and distortions are afloat, and this will at least put things in the straight line. If you like, you can mention that it is a brief statement of the principal facts of Sri Aurobindo's public life from an authoritative source.

Necessarily I have mentioned only salient facts, leaving out all mere details. As for an *estimate* of myself I have given none. In my view, a man's value does not depend on what he learns or his position or fame or what he does, but on what he is and inwardly becomes, and of that I have said nothing. I do not want to alter what I have written. If you like you can put a note of your own to the "occidental education" stating that it included Greek and Latin and two or three modern languages, but I do not myself see the necessity of it or the importance. June 1930

[5]

I would prefer another form more in keeping with the tone of the text, — eg

"It may be observed that Sri Aurobindo's education in England gave him a wide introduction to the culture of ancient, of mediaeval and of modern Europe. He was a brilliant scholar

¹ *The question was whether the correspondent could publish the "Life Sketch" over Sri Aurobindo's signature. — Ed.*

in Greek and Latin, | passed the Tripos in Cambridge in the first division, obtained record marks in Greek and Latin in the examination for the Indian Civil Service |. He had learned French from his childhood in Manchester and studied for himself Italian and German sufficiently to read Dante and Goethe in the original tongue.”²

I have left the detail about the Tripos and the record marks, though I do not find these trifles in place here; the note would read much better with the omission of the part between the vertical lines.

(But what is Beachcroft doing here? He butts in in such a vast and spreading parenthesis that he seems to be one of “these ancient languages” and in him too, perhaps, I got record marks! Besides, any ingenious reader would deduce from his presence in your note that he acquitted me out of fellow-feeling over the two “examinations” and out of university camaraderie, — which was far from being the case. I met him only in the I.C.S classes and at the I.C.S examinations and we never exchanged two words together. If any extralegal consideration came in subconsciously in the acquittal, it must have been his admiration for my prose style to which he gave fervent expression in his judgment. Don’t drag him in like this — let him rest in peace in his grave.)

27 June 1930

² *The passage within inverted commas is Sri Aurobindo’s correction of a note that had been submitted to him by the correspondent. The final version of the note appears as footnote 3 on pages 5–6. — Ed.*