

The Transformation

Early years in India, London, & South Africa

THERE WAS NOTHING UNUSUAL about the boy Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, except perhaps that he was very, very shy. He had no unusual talents, and went through school as a somewhat less than average student: self-conscious and serious, deeply devoted to his parents, and only vaguely aware of anything outside the quiet seaside town of his birth. It was the end of the nineteenth century, when the British Empire, at the peak of its wealth and power, extended around the world. India was in its second century of British domination.

“I used to be very shy and avoided all company. My books and my lessons were my sole companions. To be at school at the stroke of the hour and to run back home as soon as the school closed – that was my daily habit. I literally ran back, because I could not bear to talk to anybody. I was even afraid lest anyone should poke fun at me.”

“Moreover, I was a coward. I used to be haunted by the fear of thieves, ghosts, and serpents. I did not dare to stir out of doors at night. Darkness was a terror to me. It was almost impossible for me to sleep in the dark, as I would imagine ghosts coming from one direction, thieves from another and serpents from a third. I could not therefore bear to sleep without a light in the room.”





At the age of thirteen, while he was still in high school, Gandhi was married. It was, he wrote later, a "preposterously early" age. But Kasturbai was an attractive girl, and Gandhi quickly learned the role of a passionate, jealous, and exacting husband. Both children had a will and temper of their own, and the marriage had its stormy side from the start. In Gandhi's youthful mind, he was her teacher. Later he would realize that by her own forbearing example, it was she who had been teaching him. Her patience, her strength, her capacity to endure and forgive must have taken root deep within him during those early years, not to blossom until his campaigns in South Africa several years to come.

«I must say I was passionately fond of her. Even at school I used to think of her, and the thought of nightfall and our subsequent meeting was ever haunting me. Separation was unbearable. I used to keep her awake till late at night with my idle talk.»

«How could I disclose my fears to my wife, no child, but already at the threshold of youth, sleeping by my side? I knew that she had more courage than I, and I felt ashamed of myself. She knew no fear of serpents and ghosts. She could go out anywhere in the dark.»

GANDHI GRADUATED FROM HIGH school with a mediocre average and went doggedly on to college. He had some vague ambition to become a doctor, but it was never to be realized. He failed in every class. Each subject seemed impossible to follow, and he felt acutely out of place wherever he turned. After five months of consistent failure he withdrew from school and came back home. He had not the slightest idea of where to turn.

An uncle came to his rescue. Gandhi, he suggested, should go to London to study law. It took only three years to become a barrister, and a London degree in British India seemed certain to bring success. Reluctantly, for they were very close, his mother gave her consent. The expenses came to more than anyone had guessed; at last Kasturbai had to sell her jewelry to buy the ticket, and Gandhi's older brother gave his promise to pay the rest.

Gandhi had made a few previous trips by bullock cart to towns a few miles away. Like any eighteen-year-old, he expected the sea voyage to England to be full of excitement and adventure. Instead he found it haunted by loneliness. Shy and self-conscious, afraid to make himself look foolish with his schoolbook English, he kept to himself on board the ship and lingered for hours at the railings watching the sea. At meal-times he stayed in his cabin and lived on sweets his mother had packed away. He had selected a white flannel suit to wear when he landed, but was agonized to find himself the only man in London dressed in white.

His first few months in England were a nightmare. Everything around him was different; everything he said or did was out of place. Manners, clothes, expressions, the meaning of the slightest gesture – all these had to be learned, often through error and ridicule. He could not shake off his homesickness. Never had he been so alone.

For weeks Gandhi was on the verge of turning back and taking the

next boat home. But his pride would not allow it. Something deeper within him was determined to stick it out.

“I would continuously think of my home and country. My mother’s love always haunted me. At night the tears would stream down my cheeks, and home memories of all sorts made sleep out of the question. It was impossible to share my misery with anyone. And even if I could have done so, where was the use? I knew of nothing that would soothe me. Everything was strange. . . .”

At last an Indian acquaintance who knew his way around London took pity on him. “You’re not here to learn law,” he scolded. “You’re here to learn the English way of life. What are you doing holed up by yourself in this hotel?” Gandhi saw the point. The English had ruled his country for over two hundred years; to almost every Indian, no matter what his allegiance, they were the symbol of humanity’s greatest achievements in civilization and physical power. Even by coming to England he was tacitly acknowledging their superiority. Meekly he followed his friend’s advice and found a room with an English family.

It was Gandhi’s first experiment in mimicking lifestyles. Whenever something appealed to him, even as a boy, his first impulse had always been to try it out for himself. Now he decided to become an English gentleman. He engaged tutors in French and proper speaking, and bought expensive tailored suits and a silk top hat. He taught himself how to tie a necktie, and learned to admire himself before a mirror while he struggled to discipline his hair with an English brush. He even invested in violin lessons and tried to learn the fox-trot.

But the role of the gentleman failed to meet his needs. Far from giving him greater security, it only made him more self-conscious, more acutely aware of what others might think of how he looked and acted. Moreover, it was an expensive way of life, and since his brother was supporting him, he felt uneasy about spending his money so lavishly. The gap he sensed between his inner and outward selves was widening into a chasm.

After about three months Gandhi awoke abruptly from these dreams of grandeur. How could changing the way he dressed make him anything more than what he already was? To change his life he had to change his way of thinking, and that was something that went deeper than any differences in custom or culture. Better to be truthful to oneself than to try to act like someone else. "If my character made a gentleman of me," he wrote, "so much the better. Otherwise I should forgo the ambition." He began to experiment with a simpler way of life.

His first step was to find an apartment of his own. He gave up all lessons in social improvement, sold his violin, and began to concentrate on his studies. Then, when he discovered an impoverished student who lived in only one room and cooked his own meals, Gandhi immediately followed the example, selecting a room which was centrally located so that he could walk wherever he needed to go instead of taking the bus. It could have been a limitation; he turned it instead into an opportunity. His long walks kept him alert and strong even in the harsh London winter, and formed a habit which he kept up throughout his life. Most important, there was a self-reliance in these experiments which he had missed in imitating others. He found himself not only healthier but happier for the change.

Then he began to experiment with his diet.

Gandhi's family was vegetarian, and before he left home he had promised his mother that he would not eat meat as the English did,



With members of the Vegetarian Society, London, 1890. Gandhi is in the bottom row at the right.

though he was convinced it was one of the secrets of their strength. English friends and Indian students alike tried to persuade him that meat was essential for good health, especially in the colder climate of England. But Gandhi, though half afraid they were right, was determined not to break his promise. For months he found nothing to eat in the whole of London but bread and boiled spinach. Finally, driven by hunger, he began to investigate vegetarianism scientifically. He found a group of Englishmen who were zealous vegetarians and read their books on diet and health. Their ideas seemed well argued; Gandhi decided to put them to the test. He tried all sorts of vegetarian combinations to see which worked best for him and began giving up whatever seemed harmful, even if it was good to the taste. Gradually, deprived of the pungent

spices of Indian cooking, he began to taste the food itself instead, and realized he was relishing dishes which had been a torture to eat before. He had discovered that the sense of taste lies not in the tongue but in the mind.

But Gandhi still had not found a real direction. Becoming a barrister proved no challenge; all he had to do was to pass some notoriously easy examinations and be present for a minimum number of dinners at the Inns of Court in London. He tried to learn law anyway, despite the irrelevance of his exams, but there was no motivation to connect what he read to anything he knew. Frustrated, he tried his hand at social reform through the Vegetarian Society in London, but his awkwardness still overwhelmed him. He could not express the simplest opinions even before a sympathetic committee. He was clumsy and tongue-tied in every social situation. He read all the required lawbooks diligently, but was continually torn by doubts and anxieties over his ability to plead a case in court.

After three years in London Gandhi passed his examinations, was called to the bar, and enrolled in High Court. The very next day he sailed for home. News of his mother's illness had distressed him deeply, and he was anxious to put London behind him and get home. But his own inadequacies overwhelmed him, and he was full of misgivings about his future.

His fears proved well founded. He arrived in Bombay harbor in the middle of a dreary tropical summer squall, and the wind and the rain outside, he wrote, only matched the storm of doubt within his heart. His older brother was waiting for him at the dock; their mother, he said, had died before Gandhi could return. Knowing how much he loved her, they had withheld the news.

Gandhi buried his grief and tried to turn his face toward the promise of his legal future. But in Rajkot, his high school town, he was an imme-

diate failure. Not only did he not know how to apply legal principles to particular situations, his English book-learning left him without the slightest knowledge of Indian law. No one would dream of giving him a case.

In Bombay he fared no better. His colleagues began to refer to him laughingly as the "briefless barrister." With time on his hands he went to the High Court every day to gain experience. But the talk was dull and droned on endlessly; Gandhi had trouble following the cases and often dozed off in the middle of them. His first and only case in Bombay was a routine, ten-dollar claim. Gandhi stood up with trembling knees to make his cross-examination, but discovered abruptly that he could not utter a single word. Finally, amidst his colleagues' laughter, he handed the case over to someone with more experience and fled from the room.

IT WAS AT THIS point that Gandhi's life took one of those mysteriously fruitful turns that some observers like to ascribe to "fate" or "chance." Gandhi himself, looking back on his life from the vantage point of decades of inner evolution, called it instead an act of grace, the unfolding of events according to some deep inner necessity of which he himself was unaware. Battered by failure, with nowhere left to look for help outside, he was ready to turn inward on his long journey of self-discovery. Chance, or grace, provided him with the challenge.

At the time it did not seem like much of an opportunity. Through his brother, a local Muslim firm offered to help Gandhi out with a year's contract with its office in South Africa. It was a minor clerical position, well below the salary and prestige his English education deserved. And it meant more separation from Kasturbai, who had just borne them a second son. But Gandhi jumped at the opportunity. It was, at least, a job, a chance to gain some experience and maybe turn his back forever on his bad luck.

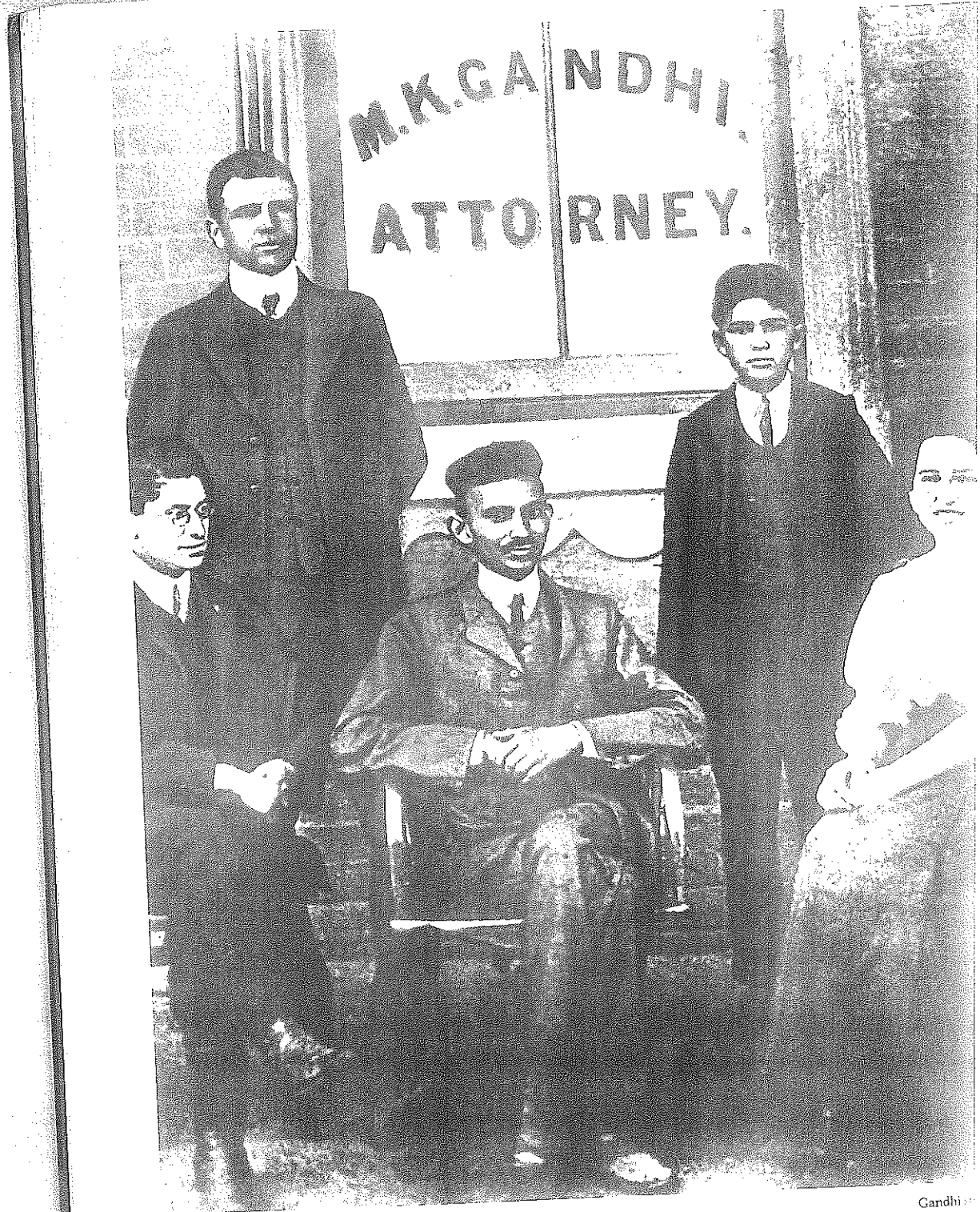
But the situation awaiting him was far from what he had expected. Dada Abdulla's Indian office had misunderstood his South African office's needs. The case Gandhi was called in on was a complicated one, requiring real skill in accounting to unravel years of complicated business transactions with inadequate records. Gandhi's job was to advise the company's legal counsel, but he was even more ignorant of bookkeeping than he was of law. Moreover, far from gaining any respect by his new move, he found himself in a land where the color of his skin alone was enough to mark him off for daily contempt and even physical abuse. He had taken all his problems with him with his luggage.

Gandhi was always a good observer of his own behavior. Every time that he had run away from failure before, no matter where he went, the same situation always seemed to recur in even more threatening proportions. This time he might have languished with pay in Dada Abdulla's offices attending to minor correspondence for twelve months and then gone home, no less a failure than before. Instead he decided to try a different tack. If changing his environment did no good, why not try to change himself? It was not something he reasoned out; it was something he felt so deeply that action was immediate. He took the challenge and threw himself into the work at hand.

Almost immediately the self-discipline he had learned in London began to pay off. He studied bookkeeping on his own and found with increasing self-confidence that his intellect proved equal to the need. Exhilarated, he strained every faculty of concentration in him to ferret out all the details of the case and find the truth. He acquired a deeper knowledge of the situation than anyone else on either side.

The facts were strongly behind his client. But the legal battle could be drawn out for months; no one stood to gain except the lawyers. Gandhi was not interested in making a profit out of legal briefs and empty arguments. He was determined to serve the best interests of both sides.





Gandhi
front of
Johannes
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Dada Abdulla and his opponent were blood relations, and every day the case dragged on only drove in deeper the wedge that was splitting their family in two. With much talking Gandhi persuaded both sides to submit to arbitration and settle out of court. Even more talking was necessary to get Dada Abdulla to agree on terms which would not bankrupt the loser, but in the end both sides were satisfied. Gandhi was ecstatic. "I had learnt," he exclaimed, "the true practice of law. I had learnt to find out the better side of human nature and to enter men's hearts. I realized that the true function of a lawyer was to unite parties riven asunder."

Without realizing it, Gandhi had found the secret of success. He began to look on every difficulty as an opportunity for service, a challenge which could draw out of him greater resources of intelligence and imagination. In turning his back on personal profit or prestige in his work, he found he had won the trust and even love of white and Indian South Africans alike. More and more people from his own community began to entrust their legal work to him and to depend on him whenever they needed help. In a few years he was a successful lawyer with an income of about twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars a year and a dignified, Westernized style of living appropriate to his station.

Satisfied for the time being, Gandhi returned to India to bring Kasturbai and their two sons back to their new home. Painfully they adjusted to the tortures of alien clothes and artificial manners. At first they objected bitterly, but Gandhi was unyielding. It was essential to look "civilized" – that is, European. That was the price of success, and all of them had to pay it. Kasturbai could not have been entirely dissatisfied. At twenty-seven, her husband was on the crest of the wave of fortune; everything they could want seemed at last within his grasp. He had reached the stage where most young men's experimentation comes to an end.

But the political and social repression of all Indians in South Africa,

and especially the desperate condition of those who came as laborers on a system equivalent to legalized slavery, had made a deep impression on Gandhi. One of these men, who had been beaten severely by his employer, came to Gandhi for help, and through him Gandhi got to know many others. He visited their homes, came to know their families and how they lived. Gradually he began to forget about himself in trying to find time and resources to alleviate the suffering of these people. They were his brothers and sisters; he identified with them more every day. Their suffering became his suffering.

When the black plague broke out in the squalid Indian ghetto of Johannesburg, the sick and dying were taken to an abandoned, quarantined building where a heroic English nurse spent long hours alone caring for them. Many years later she related that in the evening at the height of the epidemic a small figure appeared at the door. She shouted a warning: "Get out! This is plague." But the man quietly replied, "It's all right. I've come to help you."

She recognized him as a leader of the Indian community and let him in. He went straight to the sick. As she saw him bend over a dying man covered with vermin, she said, "Leave him; I'm used to it." But Gandhi attended the man himself and whispered back: "He is my brother." And he stayed throughout the night until relief came.

«My profession progressed satisfactorily, but that was far from satisfying me. The question of further simplifying my life and of doing some concrete act of service to my fellowmen had been constantly agitating me, when a leper came to my door. I had not the heart to dismiss him with a meal. So I offered him shelter, dressed his wounds, and began to look after him.»



As a
hannesburg.

«I had started on a life of ease and comfort, but the experiment was short-lived. Although I had furnished the house with care, yet it failed to have any hold on me. So no sooner had I launched forth on that life, than I began to cut down expenses. The washerman's bill was heavy, and as he was besides by no means noted for his punctuality, even two to three dozen shirts and collars proved insufficient for me. Collars had to be changed daily and shirts, if not daily, at least every alternate day. This meant a double expense which appeared to me unnecessary. So I equipped myself with a washing outfit to save it. I bought a book on washing, studied the art and taught it also to my wife. This no doubt added to my work, but its novelty made it a pleasure.

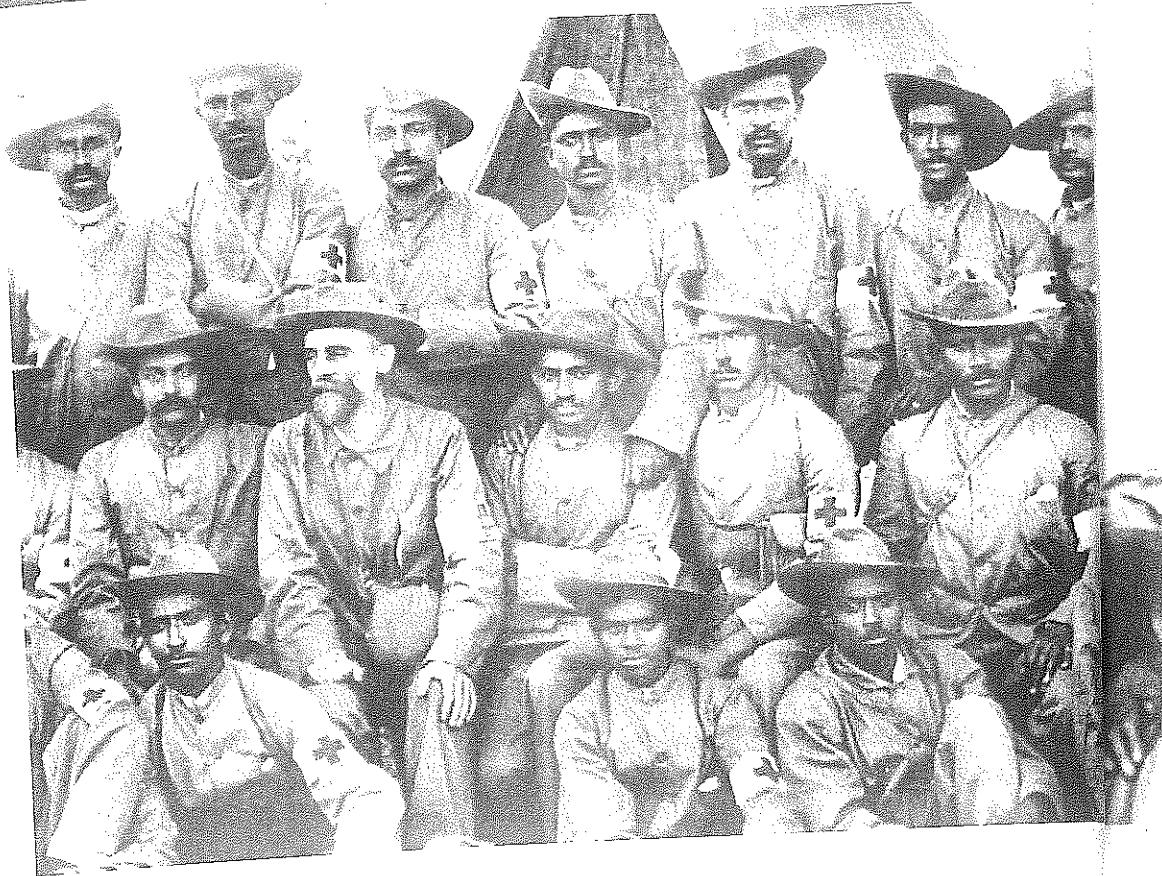
I shall never forget the first collar that I washed myself. I had used more starch than necessary, the iron had not been made hot enough, and for fear of burning the collar I had not pressed it sufficiently. The result was that, though the collar was fairly stiff, the superfluous starch continually dropped off it. I went to court with the collar on, thus inviting the ridicule of brother barristers, but even in those days I could be impervious to ridicule. . . .

In the same way, as I freed myself from slavery to the washerman, I threw off dependence on the barber. All people who go to England learn there at least the art of shaving, but none, to my knowledge, learn to cut their own hair. I had to learn that too. I once went to an English haircutter in Pretoria. He contemptuously refused to cut my hair. I certainly felt hurt, but immediately purchased a pair of clippers and cut my hair before the mirror. I succeeded more or less in cutting the front hair, but I spoiled the back. The friends in the court shook with laughter.

'What's wrong with your hair, Gandhi? Rats have been at it?'

'No. The white barber would not condescend to touch my black hair,' said I, 'so I preferred to cut it myself, no matter how badly.' »»

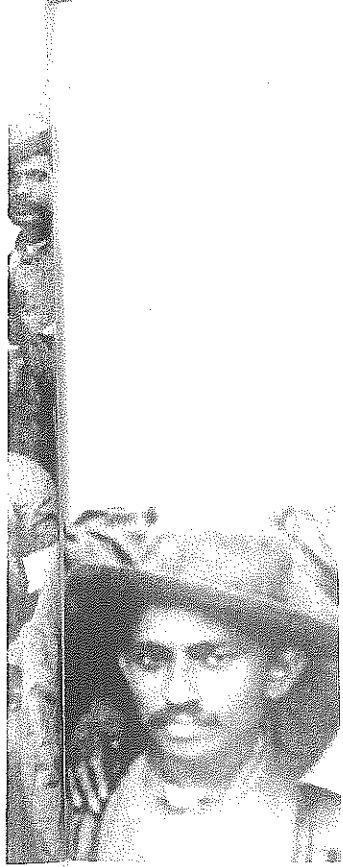
THE IDEAL OF SELFLESS service had taken hold of Gandhi and caused rapid changes in every aspect of his life. The financial returns of a successful law career, the European style of living, the complicated household – all these fell away when they became obstacles in his path of community service. Each simplification freed time, energy, and ability. Often, especially at first, it was painful to give up his time or pleasure for the sake of others' needs. But the freedom that followed was exhilarating. Gandhi's joy knew no bounds. Everywhere he began to see the possibility to choose between living for himself alone or living for the sake of others. He made time for volunteer nursing in the midst of a busy legal practice, started a weekly news magazine called *Indian Opinion*, and recruited an Indian ambulance corps to serve with the British army when war broke out with the Boer colonies in 1899. It was an infectious example, and a little family community or ashram began to grow up around him in the country outside Durban where a handful of dedicated young men and women, both European and Indian, came to live with him and share his experiments in the art of living. As his self-centeredness diminished, his spiritual awareness increased. He began to study the scriptures of all religions and test their teachings against his own experience.



“‘Do not worry in the least about yourself, leave all worry to God,’ – this appears to be the commandment in all religions.

This need not frighten anyone. He who devotes himself to service with a clear conscience, will day by day grasp the necessity for it in greater measure, and will continually grow richer in faith. The path of service can hardly be trodden by one who is not prepared to renounce self-interest, and to recognize the conditions of his birth. Consciously or unconsciously, every one of us does render some service or other. If we cultivate the habit of doing this service deliberately, our desire for service will steadily grow stronger, and will make not only for our own happiness but that of the world at large.”

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“One who would serve will not waste a thought upon his own comforts, which he leaves to be attended to or neglected by his Master on high. He will not, therefore, encumber himself with everything that comes his way; he will take only what he strictly needs and leave the rest. He will be calm, free from anger and unruffled in mind even if he finds himself inconvenienced. His service, like virtue, is its own reward, and he will rest content with it.”

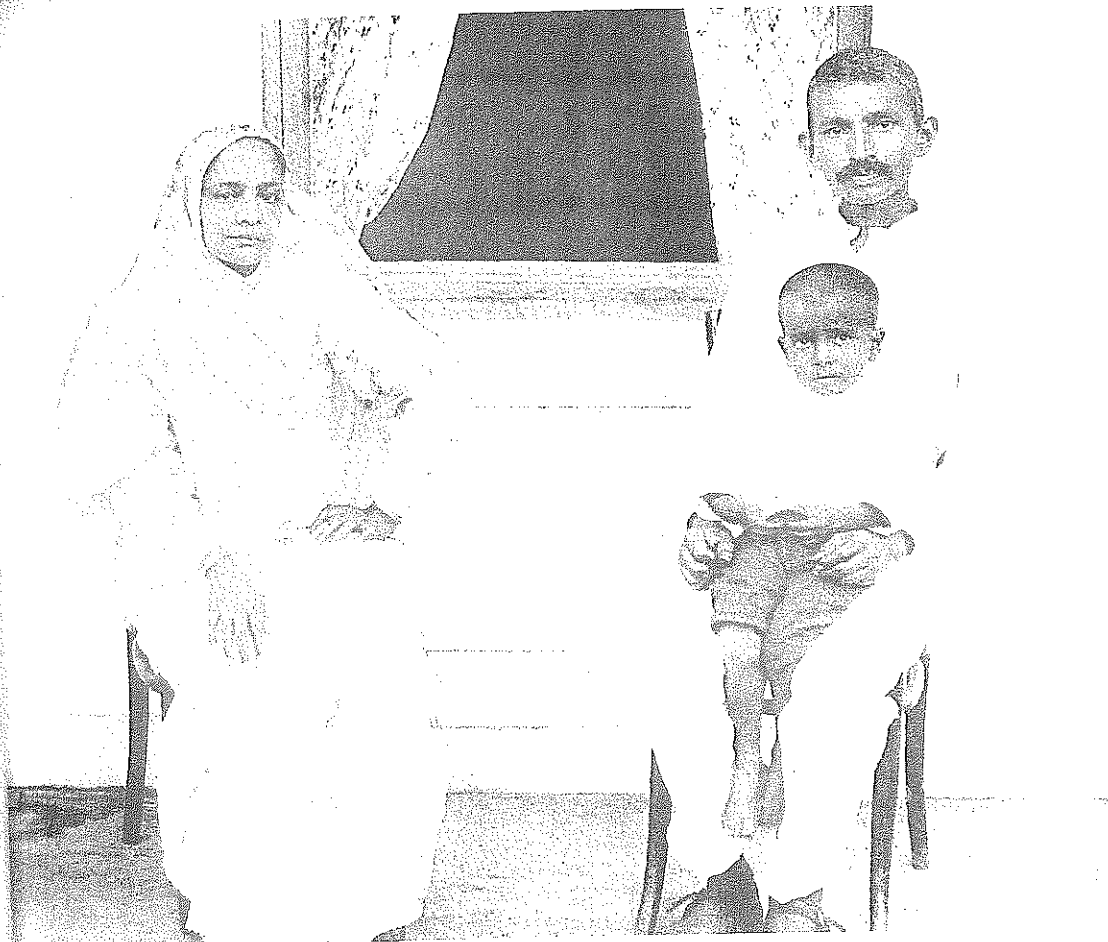
“Just as one must not receive, so must one not possess anything which one does not really need. It would be a breach of this principle to possess unnecessary foodstuffs, clothing, or furniture. For instance, one must not keep a chair if one can do without it. In observing this principle one is led to a progressive simplification of one’s own life.”

With the Indian Ambulance Corps during the Boer War, 19. Gandhi, age 30, in the center.

GANDHI WAS NO LONGER to be seen in expensive European clothes. He had simplified every detail of his household. Kasturbai, after she had learned to eat with knife and fork and given over her household to her husband's infatuation for Western ways, had to unlearn all these things and go back to her original style of living. Then, for the sake of his convictions about social equality and the dignity of hard work, he made her tend the latrines of her own house – work that had always been done by the lowest castes of Indian society. She accepted out of love, though not without bitter protest. Gandhi later said her endurance was matchless.

But family life was still far from smooth. Once the Indians in Natal showered Gandhi with gifts. They had meant to express their appreciation for his work, but they only made Gandhi spend a sleepless night pacing the floor. He had taught his wife and sons that selfless service was its own reward. How could he now accept things given to him for service to his own community, work he had done without desire for personal profit? The gifts were valuable, of gold and silver, and there was a diamond necklace for his wife. They would be difficult to give up, but more difficult to keep. Near morning Gandhi sat down and drafted a letter creating a trust of the gifts to be used for community service.

Yet how was he to persuade Kasturbai to give up the jewels? She was adamant; they were the first such compensation they had received for several years of selfless work in which she had borne at least as many difficulties as he. She pleaded with him long and bitterly, and at last broke down in tears. Finally, more exhausted than persuaded, she consented to his demands. "I have never since regretted the step," wrote Gandhi, "and as the years have gone by my wife has also seen its wisdom. It has saved us from many temptations."



With Kasturba, 1913

“One man cannot do right in one department of life whilst he is occupied in doing wrong in any other department. Life is one indivisible whole.”

THE DOMESTIC STRUGGLES IN South Africa were the training ground where Gandhi learned the demanding art of living for others rather than himself. Later he would apply the same lessons on a global scale, so that in the end the whole world became his family.



Many years later, long after he had left South Africa, Gandhi received a letter urging world leaders to draw up a charter of human rights. "In my experience," Gandhi wrote back, "it is far more important to have a charter of human duties."

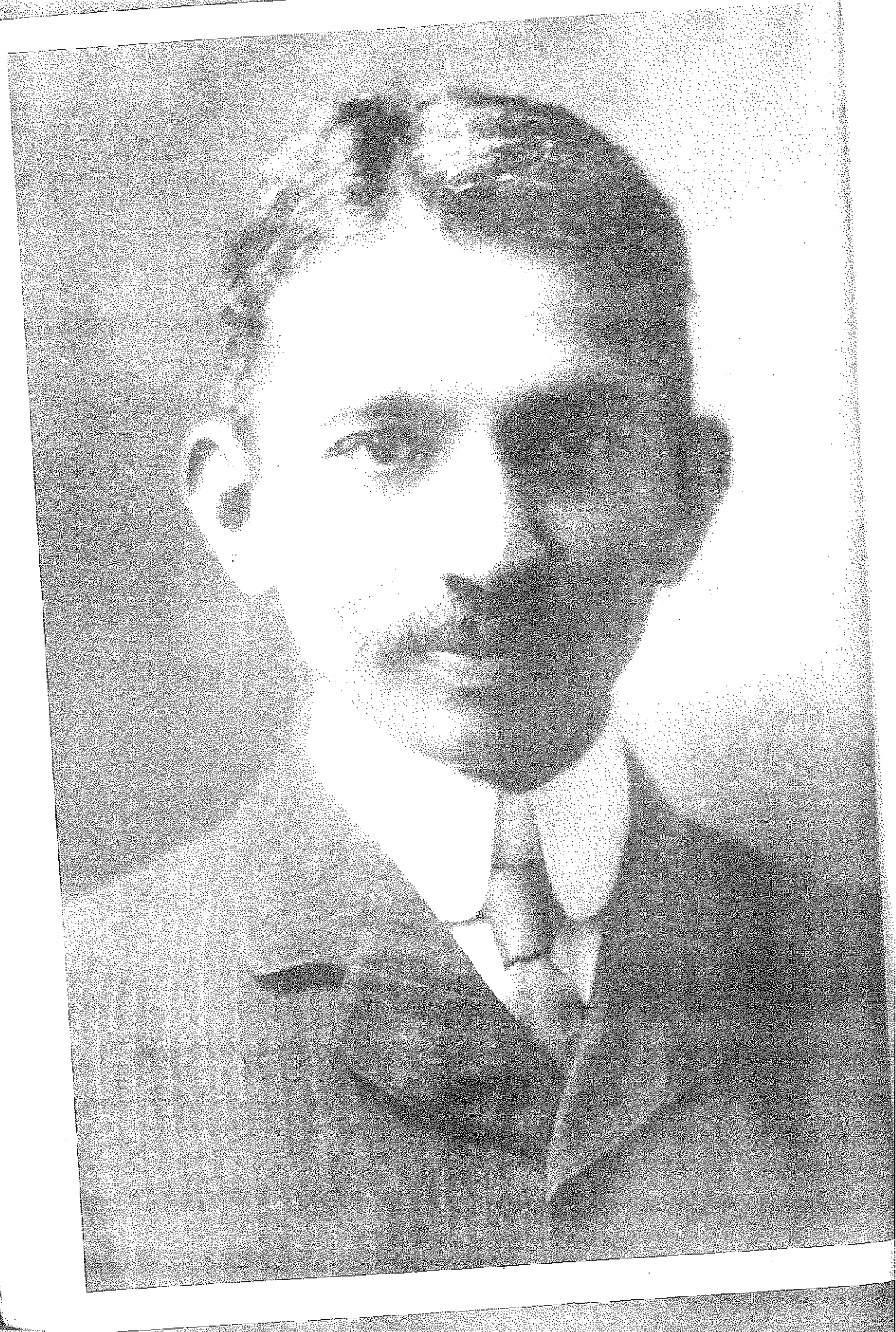
It was an approach he had learned from Kasturbai. When he came back from his student years in London, Gandhi explained, fully cultured and acutely conscious of his "legitimate rights," the first person he tried to impress with all this status was his wife. Kasturbai Gandhi, however, was a woman with a will of her own. Gandhi began to demand his rights the minute he came home; and Kasturbai, naturally, started to do the same – at the same time, in the same house. Often their disagreements became so fierce that Kasturbai was reduced to tears, which only irritated Gandhi more. Once, exasperated, he shouted at her: "I will not stand this nonsense in my house!"

"Then keep your house to yourself," Kasturbai pleaded, "and let me go!"

In a rage Gandhi grabbed her by the arm and dragged her weeping to the gate.

"Have you no sense of shame?" she cried through her tears. "Where can I go? I have no family here to take me in. Because I am your wife, do you think I have to put up with your abuse? For heaven's sake behave yourself and shut the gate. Let's not be caught making such a scene!"

It is Gandhi himself who relates the incident. At the time, he says, he thought it was his right as a husband to impose his opinions on his wife. But as the years passed and the storms between them continued, he began to realize what anguish he was causing her by this rigid outlook. At last it occurred to him that rather than exercise his "rights," he could fulfill his responsibilities. With Gandhi, to know was to feel, to feel was to act, to act was to live. Immediately, instead of forcing Kasturbai's obedience to his newfound beliefs and values, he began to try to win



her over by his own example. It was a long, painful process, and often Gandhi had to ignore his cherished likes and dislikes to see things from her point of view rather than his own. But gradually he began to see that there was no friction between them except what he had imposed, and that Kasturbai had always been trying to win him over by love. It was one of the most radical discoveries he was to make in a lifetime of experimentation: in order to transform others, you first have to transform yourself.

Gandhi's experiments were leading him into rarely traveled regions deep below the surface level of living, where the ordinary values of buying and selling, prestige and pleasure, held no meaning at all. Writers and philosophers before him had written thick volumes on truth and happiness, but few of them had been able to change their lives. Gandhi was not interested in such abstract principles. He wanted to know how to live, and was willing to transform his whole personality, if necessary, to bring him closer to that goal. He scrutinized the lives and works of men from many other nationalities and faiths, looking for a guide. When he found one at last it was in the spiritual tradition of his own land, a tradition unbroken for more than five thousand years.

The Bhagavad Gita had always been near him while he was a child. Ironically, he did not begin to glimpse its practicality until he was in England: with English friends, reading an English translation. The first time he read it, he recalled, its words went straight to his heart. In South Africa they began to penetrate his actions as well. There the Gita became what he called his "spiritual reference book," the practical guide through the dangers and challenges he encountered as he deepened his search for truth.



Gandhi, sitting bottom right, with his youngest son, Devadas, top right; Herman Kallenbach and his dog on the left, and others at Tolstoy Farm near Johannesburg, probably 1910.



«What effect this reading of the Gita had on my friends, only they can say; but to me the Gita became an infallible guide of conduct. It became my dictionary of daily reference. Just as I turned to the English dictionary for the meanings of English words that I did not understand, I turned to this dictionary of conduct for a ready solution of all my troubles and trials. Words like 'aparigraha' (non-possession) and 'samabhava' (equability) gripped me. How to cultivate and preserve that equability was the question. How was one to treat alike insulting, insolent and corrupt officials, co-workers of yesterday raising meaningless opposition, and men who had always been good to one? How was one to divest oneself of all possessions? . . . Was I to give up all I had and follow Him? Straight came the answer: I could not follow Him unless I gave up all I had.

My study of English law came to my help. . . . I understood the Gita teaching of non-possession to mean that those who desired salvation should act like the trustee who, though having control over great possessions, regards not an iota of them as his own.»

THE GITA GIVES DETAILED instructions for crossing the sea of life. The battlefield where the narrative is set represents the individual human heart, where the forces of light and darkness, love and separateness, war incessantly for mastery over our thought and actions. In the dialogue which unfolds, Arjuna, the warrior prince who represents every man or woman, seeks to learn the art of living from Sri Krishna, the Lord of Love, who is the outward manifestation of Arjuna's deepest self. Arjuna is a man of action. He is not interested in metaphysics or airy theories; he wants to know how to make every moment of his life count, free from anxiety and fear. His questions are practical inquiries into the problems of living, and Sri Krishna's answers are simple and to the point. We are born to fight, he tells Arjuna; there is no choice in the matter. Our every desire must bring us into conflict. But we can choose how and whom we will fight. We can turn our anger against others, or we can turn it against what is selfish and angry in ourselves. We can use our hands to strike at others or to wipe their tears away. It is a call to action, and that is why Sri Krishna describes the heroes and heroines of the Gita's "way of love" in the language not of sentiment but of war:

That one I love who is incapable of ill will
And returns love for hatred.
Living beyond the reach of *I* and *mine*
And of pleasure and pain, full of mercy,
Contented, self-controlled, firm in faith,
With all his heart and all his mind given
To me – with such a one I am in love.



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Not agitating the world or by it agitated,
They stand above the sway of elation,
Competition, and fear, accepting life,
Good and bad, as it comes. They are pure,
Efficient, detached, ready to meet every demand
I make on them as a humble instrument of my work. . . .

Who serve both friend and foe with equal love,
Not buoyed up by praise nor cast down by blame,
Alike in heat and cold, pleasure and pain,
Free from selfish attachments and self-will,
Ever full, in harmony everywhere,
Firm in faith – such as these are dear to me.

It was in South Africa that Gandhi learned to translate these tremendous ideals into effective action. Inspired by the response to his nursing efforts during the Boer War, he had recruited a second Indian ambulance corps to help the Natal government put down a “rebellion” among the Zulu natives. This time, however, he found no glory on the field. The “rebellion” turned out to be just an excuse for a manhunt which opened Gandhi’s eyes to the horrors of war. Every morning he woke up to the sound of gunshots as the British armies swept through and destroyed another Zulu village, and he and his volunteers had to march sometimes as much as forty miles a day with the bodies of innocent natives who had been mercilessly mistreated by the vengeful British soldiers. The senselessness of their suffering would not let him rest. Night and day, carrying their stretchers across the vast deserted hill country of Natal, he plunged himself deep into prayer and self-examination in a fervent search for greater strength with which to serve.

The intensity of his desire led him to the source of power itself. Deep in meditation Gandhi began to see how much of his vital energy was locked up in the sexual drive. In a flood of insight he realized that sex is not just a physical instinct, but an expression of the tremendous spiritual force behind all love and creativity which the Hindu scriptures call *kundalini*, the life-force of evolution. All his life it had been his master, buffeting him this way and that beyond his control. But in the silence of the Natal hills, with all his burning desire to serve focused by weeks of tending to the wounded and dying, Gandhi found the strength to tap this power at its source. Then and there he resolved to be its master and never to let it dictate to him again. It was a decision which resolved his deepest tensions and released all the love within him into his conscious control. He had begun to transform the last of his passions into spiritual power.