**Ms. R. Vedha, Assistant Professor of English, Bon Secours College for Women, Thanjavur**

**Playing the English Gentleman (Chapter 15 from ‘The Story of My Experiments with Truth’)**

My faith in vegetarianism grew on me from day to c Salt's book whetted my appetite for dietetic studies. I went in all books available on vegetarianism and read them. One of these, Howard Williams' The Ethics of Diet, was a biographical history of the literature of humane dietetics from the earliest period to the present day'. It tried to make out, that philosophers and prophets from Pythagoras and Jesus down to those of the present age were vegetarians. Dr. Anna Kingsford's The Perfect Way in Diet was also an attractive book. Dr. Allinson's writings on health and hygiene were likewise \ helpful. He advocated a curative system based on regulation the dietary of patients. Himself a vegetarian, he prescribed ery of for his patients also a strictly vegetarian diet. The result of reading all this literature was that dietetic experiments came to take an important place in my life. Health was the principal consideration of these experiments to begin with. But later on religion became the supreme motive.

Meanwhile my friend had not ceased to worry about me. lis love for me led him to think that, if I persisted in my objections o meat-eating, I should not only develop a weak constitution, but should remain a duffer, because I should never feel at home in English society. When he came to know that I had begun to interest myself in books on vegetarianism, he was afraid lest these studies should muddle my head; that I should fritter my life away in experiments, forgetting my own work, and become a crank. He therefore made one last c:. vft to reform me. He one day invited me to go to the theatre. Before the'Vey We were to dine together at the Holborn Restaurant, t me a palatial place and the first big restaurant I had been to since leaving "The Victoria Hotel". The stay at that hotel had scarcely been a helpful experience for I had not lived there with my wits about me. The friend had planned to take me to this restaurant evidently imagining that modesty would forbid any questions. And it was a very big company of diners in the midst of which my friend and I sat sharing a table between us. The first course was sm., I wondered what it might be made of, but dared not ask the frie about it. I therefore summoned the waiter, My friend saw t movement and sternly asked across the table what was t matter. With considerable hesitation I told him that I wanted inquire if the soup was a vegetable soup. 'You are too elm for decent society,' he passionately exclaimed 'If you canr behave yourself, you had better go. Feed in some off restaurant and await me outside.' This delighted me. Out I we There was a vegetarian restaurant close by, but it was closE So I went without food that night. I accompanied my friend to t and he he to sy ot er nt. d. he theatre, but he never said a word about the scene I had created. On my part of course there was nothing to say.

That was the last friendly tussle we had. It did not affect our relations in the least. I could see and appreciate the love which all my friend's efforts were actuated, and my respect by for him was all the greater on account of our differences in thought and action.

But I ,decided that I should put him at ease, that I should assist that I would be clumsy no more, but try to become polished Ad make up for my vegetarianism by cultivating other complishments which fitted one for polite society. And for this irpose I undertook the all too impossible task of becoming an English gentleman.

The clothes after the Bombay cut that I was wearing were, thought, unsuitable for English society, and I got new ones at e Army and Navy stores. I also went in for a chimney-pot hat costing nineteen shillings — an excessive price in those days. Not content with this, I wasted ten pounds on an evening suit made in Bond Street, the centre of fashionable life in London; .and got my good and noble-hearted brother to send me a double watch-chain of gold. It was not correct to wear a ready-made tie ;Ind I learnt the art of tying one for myself. While in India, the mirror had been a luxury permitted on the days when the family barber gave me a shave. Here I wasted ten minutes every day before a huge mirror, watching myself arranging my tie and parting my hair in the correct fashion. My hair was by no means soft, and every day it meant a regular struggle with the brush to keep it in position. Each time the hat was put on and off, the hand would automatically move towards the head to adjust the hair, not to mention the other civilized habit of the hand every now and then operating for the same purpose when sitting in polished society.

As if all this were not enough to make me look the thing, I directed my attention to other details that were supposed to go towards the making of an English gentleman. I was told it was necessary for me to take lessons in dancing, French and elocution. French was not only the language of neighbouring France, but it was the lingua franca of the Continent over which I had a desire to travel. I decided to take dancing lessons at a class and paid down £3 as fees for a term. I must have taken about six lessons in three weeks. But it was beyond me to achieve anything like rhythmic motion. I could not follow the piano and hence found it impossible to keep time. What then was I to do? The recluse in the fable kept a cat to keep off the rats, and then a cow to feed the cat with milk, and a man to keep the cow and so on. My ambitions also grew like the family of the recluse. I thought I should learn to play the violin in order to cultivate an ear for Western music. So I invested £3 in a violin and something more in fees. I sought a third teacher to give me lessons in elocution and paid him a preliminary fee of a guinea. He recommended Bell's Standard Elocutionist as the text-book, which I purchased. And I began with a speech of Pitt's.

But Mr. Bell rang the bell of alarm in my ear and I awoke.

I had not to spend a lifetime in England, I said to myself. What then was the use of learning elocution? And how could (lancing make a gentleman of me? The violin I could learn even in India. I was a student and ought to go on with my studies. I should qualify myself to join the Inns of Court. If my character made a gentleman of me, so much the better. Otherwise I should forego the ambition.

These and similar thoughts possessed me, and I expressed them in a letter which I addressed to the elocution teacher, requesting him to excuse me from further lessons. I had taken only two or three. I wrote a similar letter to the dancing teacher, and went personally to the violin teacher with a request o dispose of theviolin for any price it might fetch. She was rather riendly to me, so I told her how I had discovered that I was pursuing a false ideal. She encouraged me in the determination to make a complete change.

This infatuation must have lasted about three months. the punctiliousness in dress persisted for years. But henceforward I became a student.

OUTLINE SUMMARY

Before leaving to London to study Law, Gandhi made vow to his mother that he would abstain from meat, alcohol ar women. His time in London was influenced by the vow he he made to his mother. In London he remained a pure vegetarian and to become an English gentleman, he changed his dress, lair style and learnt the art of tying himself his tie. He also took lessons in dancing, French and elocution. Soon he realized that he was not going to spend a life time in England. He had come there only as a student. So he withdrew himself from dancing Ind elocution classes. But his attention and care in dress continued for years.

DETAILED SUMMARY

During his stay in London, Gandhi's faith in vegetarianism 'creased everyday. Henry Salt's book made him read many books available on vegetarianism. After reading these books, dietetic, xperiments took an important place in his life. Health was the fincipal consideration of these experiments.

Gandhi's friend thought that if Gandhi remained a vegetarian, he would become physically weak and would remain slow learner. He felt that the books on vegetarianism would confuse Gandhi and would make him waste away his life, in experiments, forgetting his work. He del ded to change Gandhi. One day the friend invited Gandhi to ge, with him to a theatre. I iefore going to the theatre, he took Gandhi to a restaurant. When soup was served to them, Gandhi asked the waiter whether it was a vegetable soup. The friend was much offended. He asked sandhi to eat in some other restaurant and to wait for him outside. So, Gandhi left the, place. As the vegetarian restaurant was closed, Gandhi had to go without food that night. Then they went to the theatre but none talked about Gandhi's behaviour at the restaurant. Though Gandhi and his friend differend in their thoughts and actions, all the actions of the friend showed his love for Gandhi and Gandhi's respect for the friend was greater.

Gandhi decided to make up for his vegetarianism by developing other actions which would fit him for a polite society and please his friend. So he decided to undertake all the difficult activities of becoming an English gentleman.

As the clothes he was wearing after the Bombay cut was unsuitable for the English society Gandhi bought new ones. He also got a costly hat. He also bought an evening suit and asked his brother to send him a double watch chain of gold. He learnt the pr4 of tying his tie to himself. Everyday he spent ten mininutes before the Mirror to arrange his hair and tie. He developed the habit of adjusting ,is hair while sitting in a polished society.

In order to make himself a perfect English gentleman, he decided to take lessons in dancing, French and elocution. As he could not follow the piano, he could not learn anything from the dancing lessons. So in order to develop a taste for Western Music, he joined the violin class. For the elocution class, he bought Bell's 'Standard Elocutionist' as the text book.

This book made him realise that he was not going to hend his life time in England. So, there was no use in learning ducution. Dancing would not make him a gentleman. He could in violin even in India. He had come there to study Law. He .hould concentrate only on practicing Law. Otherwise he could ilot achieve his ambition. Only his character should make him a gentleman.

This realisation made him write letters to the elocution luacher and dancing teacher requesting them to excuse him from further lessons. He went in person to the violin teacher and r.xplained himself.

This infatuation of Gandhi lasted for about three months. Itut his attention and care for his dress continued for years. From hat time onwards he became a real student.

Soup 2 hotels

Dress, chimney-pot hat of 19 shillings

Evening suit from bond street – 10 pounds

Gold chain watch, 10 minutes before mirror

Dancing 3 pounds per term 6 classes in tjhree weeks couldn’t follow piano

Violin – 3 pounds

French

Elocution plenary fee

Letter to e and d

Personal to violin

Character gentleman

Attraction 3 months