



The Sadhu: A Study In Mysticism And Practical Religion

B. H. Streeter, A. J. Appasamy

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BETWEEN the Mystics of any past age and ourselves there is, quite apart from the problem of the mystic consciousness itself, a barrier of time and circumstance which no effort of the historic imagination can completely penetrate. In this book we attempt a study of a Mystic, with the unique advantage that he is a contemporary of our own.

He is also one of those Mystics who appeal to the present age because it is precisely his consciousness of communion with the Divine that impels him to a life of unselfish activity and the practical service of mankind.

Sadhu Sundar Singh—"the Sadhu" as he is popularly called—lives in this twentieth century a life which, so far as external conditions are concerned, resembles that of St. Francis of Assisi. His inward experience recalls rather, in some ways, St. Paul, in others Mother Juliana, while in others it is individual to himself. If, however, we venture thus to speak of him and them together, it is not by way of asserting a comparison of greatness: it is merely to indicate an identity of type. Whether Sundar Singh is a great man in the sense in which History employs that term, History alone can decide. In that sense no man can be pronounced great till his career is ended, nor even then by his own contemporaries. But we do not suggest that the Sadhu is on the same plane with St. Francis or St. Paul, we feel that, from having known him, we understand them better.

The Sadhu is no *metaphysician*, no scientist, no higher critic. Indeed his intellectual horizon is in many respects nearer that of the New Testament writers than that of the modern world—but so also is his intuitive insight into moral and religious values. It is this directness and simplicity of spiritual perception which impresses upon all who have been in close contact with him the conviction that he has a message—not only to his own countrymen, but also to the West.

The manner of his teaching, even more than its substance, has a peculiar freshness for a Western hearer, with its picturesque abundance of illustration and parable, often quaint but always apt, its unstudied spontaneity, its gleams of kindly humor. It is rendered doubly effective by an arresting appearance—the impression of the turbaned head and saffron robe harmonizing in some subtle way with the deep tranquility of a countenance lighted up by loving-kindness, and with a vivacity of expression, and occasionally of gesture, which somehow seems not to conflict with, but to express, the Peace of God within.

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