Gandhi's Truth
On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence
Now that I knew the scene, the strike of 1918 seemed to me to have not only a certain dramatic and psychoanalytic interest but also a crucial importance in history, a feeling which was growing stubbornly against what little evidence had come my way. True, there is only one little paperbound pamphlet on the strike; it is less than a hundred pages long and costs 35 cents. And what the witnesses of that Event could tell me was highly fragmentary. In Gandhi’s biographies and even in his Autobiography, this first fast is even described as somewhat of a mistake, a failure of nerve if also obviously the first use of a mighty weapon. Such a failure by no means diminishes a clinician’s interest: for how did Gandhi get into this situation in the first place? And if, indeed, he failed, why did he, or why did he think so? He was “drawn into it,” his followers say; but I began to doubt that this wily little man ever was drawn into a decision which he did not choose for long- (very long-) range reasons.

This is how Gandhi reports the Event in his Autobiography. In a chapter called “In Touch with Labour” he gives more than half the space to a previous campaign in which “my co-workers and I had built many castles in the air, but they all vanished for the time being.” Then he reports on the “delicate situation” in Ahmedabad, where “Shrimati Anasuyabai had to battle against her own brother, Shri Ambalal Sarabhai.” His relations with both,
Gandhi's Truth

he reports, were friendly, and "that made fighting with them the more difficult." But he considered the case of the mill hands strong, and he therefore "had to advise the labourers to go on strike." There follows a summary, less than one page long, of twenty-one days which will, of course, be retold in great detail once we have prepared our case for claiming a central position for the Event in Gandhi's life history, in the history of Indian Labor, and in that of militant nonviolence. On the one page devoted to the strike, however, there are two mismemories, as I will show later.

The Mahatma then drops the whole matter (without any concluding moral or, indeed, conclusion to the story), only to offer as his next installment "A Peep into the Ashram." Re-counting that because of the plague the ashram had been removed from the suburb of Kochrab to its present site by the Sabarmati, then far removed from the city, he takes time out to be lyrical in the description of the landscape and humorous in regard to its exact location:

... Its vicinity to the Sabarmati Central Jail was for me a special attraction. As jail-going was understood to be the normal lot of Satyagrahis, I liked this position.

There they lived at first under canvas with a tin shed for a kitchen. Half of this installment, however, is devoted to the daily encounter of his ashramites with the snakes which infested the ashram grounds. And the Mahatma concludes:

The rule of not killing venomous reptiles has been practiced for the most part at Phoenix, Tolstoy Farm and Sabarmati. At each of these places we had to settle on waste lands. We have, however, no loss of life occasioned by snake bite... if it be a superstition to believe that complete immunity from harm for twenty-five years in spite of a fairly regular practice of non-killing is not a fortuitous accident but a grace of God, I should still hug that superstition.

Today we have naturalistic grounds for believing that this was no superstitition; and we will discuss in a later chapter other instances of pacific propensities on the part of beasts. Here the point is that only after this "peep into the ashram" does the Mahatma return to the strike and report on his first fast and on its ambiguous outcome. He seems to have felt that by fasting he had blackmailed the employers as much as he had kept the weakening workers in line, so that the relative success of the strike was marred by a failure of moral nerve. But what could the nonkilling of snakes have to do with the Ahmedabad strike and with Gandhi's relation to the mill owner?

I came to suspect, then, that that strike and that fast represented a demonstrable crisis in the middle age of a great man and was worthy of study as such. I had been asked often, of course, how and where Gandhi "solved his identity crisis." But that—if any one event ever symbolizes it—had happened way back in the railroad station of Maritzburg in South Africa when he, the ineffectual and yet stubborn young barrister-made-in-England, was ejected from a train because he insisted on traveling first-class although he was a "cooie," that is, "coloured." There, instead of effecting his plans to go home to the hated practice of law, he abandoned his shy self literally overnight and committed himself to his political and religious destiny as a leader. In 1918, however, Gandhi was already nearly fifty years old. But the surviving witnesses were in their middle and late twenties and could be suspected to have joined him while still in their identity crises. So here was a crisis in a middle-aged leader which I could study by studying those who, when they met him, had been struggling for their identity.

My growing interest in this confrontation of Gandhi and Ahmedabad seemed to be leading me into an "in-between" period of Gandhi's life: the South African Gandhi already had become historical and had earned himself the renown due to a mahatma, while the history of Gandhiji, the Mahatma of all India, had not yet begun.

Saying good-bye to Ambalal, to Anasuya, and to Shankerlal, I knew that in order to see whether there was a story here, I would have to come back with the sole purpose of talking to them and to some other people of their age group and experience. Shankerlal agreed strongly, and he asked me to speak on my last day in Ahmedabad to the daily prayer meeting at the
Textile Association. In hearing myself talk to them about 1918, I knew I had some kind of story to tell.

Before I left India, I took a quick glance at old newspapers and documents. Nothing could have been more discouraging. The London Times had only noted sarcastically:

Passive resistance is an obsession with Mr. Gandhi, and he applies it to every issue. Recently he sought to coerce Ahmedabad mill owners into granting their employees a 37 per cent increase in wages by vowing abstention from food until the increase was granted. The dispute was settled by a childish compromise. Mr. Gandhi's honesty is recognized, but some of those associated with him want to embarrass the Government"

And even this was more than the Indian papers had to say about the event. The Bombay Chronicle—the English-language paper in the Bombay Presidency (which then included Gujarat and Ahmedabad)—only wondered why Mr. M. K. Gandhi had staked so much on this local matter from which he had "little to gain and everything to lose."22 This attitude could be classified as a "pre-historic" view conducive to retrospective correction after Mr. M. K. Gandhi's entry into national and international history. But there was also a decidedly ahistoric undertone in some of the news of the day which did not augur well for any inquiry. Of the group of mill owners headed by Ambalal, the same correspondent from Ahmedabad reported to the Chronicle:

... When its labours are over and the task it has put its hand to is accomplished, it will again melt away and no one will care to know what it was and how it came into being."

And things did not improve when I looked for other documents. It soon seemed as if there had been no fire or flood, no lonely bookworm or busy tribe of ants, no fire-setting rebel or neglectful bureaucrat who had not set out to destroy the bits of fresh evidence which I felt I needed. The British Commissioner of Ahmedabad had at one time ordered all the records of the Navajivan Trust (Gandhi's literary heirs) destroyed, while his own records went up in flames in 1946-47.

Echoes of an Event

I visited the Ahmedabad Millowners' Association. Climbing up the ramp to that fortress built by Le Corbusier with all the wastefulness of concrete which characterizes the post-Mogul grandeur of modern India, I found the halls grand, cool, and airy, but the offices empty. Only chattering sweepers were to be seen and heard. Finally peeking into an open door, I saw hand-some old Professor Acharya, erstwhile teacher of Sanskrit and new secretary of the association, sitting at his desk like the statue of a Roman senator. 1918? No, there was no use looking. There was "not a scrap of paper" from the time before the middle twenties, and even after that much material had been lost in transit from inner Ahmedabad to this colossal new home by the river.

The Library of the State of Maharashtra in Bombay, heir to many files of the State of Gujarat, refused outright to let me see them. But the Library of the Government of India in Delhi (who are not planning, as is the Government of Maharashtra, to use these documents in a major publication of their own) did not hesitate to let me see some of what I had been refused in Bombay. So there, at last, the Index of the Home Department registered: "1918, Part B, Regarding a dispute by the mill owners and their employees at Ahmedabad." But a parenthesis added "destroyed."

Assuming that the Commissioner and others must have re-ported to their home offices in London, I subsequently inquired at the library of the old India Office in London, only to be told that the documents of 1918 would not be released until 1969. I was notified that...

... any, official comments by the governments, Local Commissioner, etc., on the strike would be most likely to be found in the series of Official Records, such as the Proceedings of the Judicial and Public Department, and such series, under the law by which official documents less than fifty years old may not be made available to the public, are only available for consultation up to the year 1914.

An influential Indian who graciously offered his help received this notification from the India Office records:
I have examined the Judicial and Public and Revenue and Statistics Departments' Registers and Indexes, but we appear to hold no documents relating to the Ahmedabad Mill Strike of 1918 and Gandhi's first fast. I have also tried Parliamentary Papers and the Bombay Native Newspaper Reports without success. An official of the Library's European Manuscripts section has consulted the Montagu and Chelmsford Collections but also without result.

At the end my best friends were the British spies of the Criminal Intelligence Division of the old Home Department, who dutifully reported what they had observed, in documents which had been marked "to be burned" but, of course, had escaped this fate. Those men had observed well. Sitting at my desk in the National Archives in Delhi, I found myself saluting smartly (to the wonderment of the studious readers around me) the memory of a secret operative who had left this bit of prophecy in the intelligence file for February, 1918:

Whilst I am not disposed to attach any importance to Muhammadan ebullition at the Calcutta meeting, I fear that Mr. Gandhi's advice may not fall on altogether deaf ears. Combining as he does with the earnestness of a fanatic, the unselfishness and simplicity of living of a Sanyasi, his advice is more likely to be followed than that of any other agitator in the Presidency. 24

A month later there was another weekly report which had escaped the fate of burning with equal insubordination: "In reality, the mill owners are afraid of Gandhi and hope to break his power."

But I could find no reference to Gandhi's first fast in any public document or in the news sections of any major Indian newspaper of 1918. What a historical distance, then, from that first fast to the later ones when the world held its breath and when Indians would speak in whispers and many would refuse to light their candles and lanterns in the evening while the Mahatma fasted!

The later grandeur of his public fasting as a political act was in 1918 simply not part of anybody's expectation—except, so I have come to believe strongly, his own. And, indeed, at the time, Gandhi told Mahadev Desai, the fast had been "the most valuable lesson of my life" and his "best deed so far." 24 And finally, in leafing gingerly but determinedly through a crumbling number of the Bombay Chronicle of March 1918, I found back among the letters to the editor a long epistle signed M. K. Gandhi and coolly captioned "Mr. Gandhi's Opinion." 28

The letter commenced with the sentence:

Perhaps I owe an explanation to the public with regard to my recent fast. Some friends consider the action to have been silly, others cowardly and some others still worse. In my opinion, I would have been untrue to my Maker and to the cause I was espousing if I had acted otherwise. 27

And it ended thus:

... I felt that it was a sacred moment for me, my faith was on the anvil, and I had no hesitation in rising and declaring to the men that a breach of their vow so solemnly taken was unendurable by me and that I would not take any food until they had the 35 per cent increase given or until they had fallen. A meeting that was up to now unlike the former meetings, totally unresponsive, woke up as if by magic 28

Gandhi, then, had himself attempted to bring the fast to the immediate attention of the major papers of India! But, alas, it was not "newsworthy."

I left India with the determination to study this matter, and to return in order to interview those who had witnessed the Event. My curiosity was increased, by two factors:

When I came to Ahmedabad, it had become clear to me (for I had just come from the disarmament conference of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences) that man as a species can no longer afford any more to cultivate illusions either about his own "nature" or about that of other species, or about those "pseudo-species" he calls enemies—not while inventing and manufacturing arsenals capable of global destruction and while relying for inner and outer peace solely on the superbrakes built into the superweaponry. And Gandhi seems to have been the only man who has visualized and demonstrated an over-all alternative.

Less nobly, I should admit that I must have been looking for a historical figure to write about. What could be more fitting than (as my students put it) letting "Young Man Luther" be fol-
Gandhi's Truth

lowed by "Middle-Aged Mahatma"? And here I had witnesses: the survivors of a generation of then-young men and women who had joined or met Gandhi in 1918, and whose lives had not been the same since, as if one knew what they might have been. They included, besides the mill owner and his sister, individuals now retired or still in the forefront of national activity in industry, in the Union Cabinet, or in Parliament. These I set out to meet and to interview on my subsequent visits to India.

PART ONE

The Inquiry
I. MONIYA AND HIS MOTHER

THE EARLIEST available photograph of Moniya makes it quite plausible that the small child "had a cheerful, sweet face and lovely eyes." Pyarelal's description omits, however, the big and protruding ears which help to "round out" the little boy's face but later would rob the Mahatma's countenance of its proportions, especially when he laughed in his toothless way. That all through life he loved to laugh and make others laugh, later pictures, too, make plausible; and even in the somber days of his young manhood, he would write in his diary that he could always console mother by making her laugh heartily. So we gladly believe relal—gladly, not the least, because what is a saint without gaiety?—that Moniya had a hearty ringing laugh-ter, and that everybody liked to fondle him.

The youngest and last son of a young mother (25) and an aging father (47), Moniya was born into a large family crammed into a big house with many small rooms in the port city of Porbandar on the Arabian Sea coast of the peninsula of Kathiawar. Thus, like many great leaders, he was born on the periphery of his future "domain" and in a setting which would provide a strong regional identity to start with. Porbandar is a fishermen's and a sea traders' world, renowned for its toughness and shrewdness, for from here as from the larger nearby port of
Cambay, the ships went back and forth between India and Arabia and the east coast of Africa—down to South Africa, where the man Gandhi later would "find his vocation."

For all those who know only the stereotyped Gandhi of the "Experiments," it may be difficult to imagine the little boy roaming about in the sensuous and populous setting in which he grew up. Porbandar is a town which with its narrow lanes and crowded bazaars, surrounded by massive walls which have since been largely demolished, is no more than a stone's throw from the Arabian Sea. The buildings, though by no means architecturally distinguished, are built of a white soft stone which hardens with the years, shines like marble in the sunlight, and has given to the town the romantic name of the 'White City.' The streets are dotted with temples; the ancestral house of the Gandhis was itself built around two temples. But the life of this port was and is necessarily centred on the sea.

Moniya was born and grew up in a three-story ancestral house which in photographs looks imposing and roomy enough, but was shared by his father with his five brothers and their families. The suite allotted to his father, the head of this clan and prime minister of the small princely state of Porbandar, "was on the ground floor and had, besides a tiny kitchen and veranda, two rooms, one of which was 20 feet long and 13 feet wide and the other 13 feet long and 12 feet wide." Six generations of Gandhis were home ministers or prime ministers on the Kathiawar peninsula, which counted an abundance of princely states, some larger than a fairly large estate, some smaller. The "sovereignty" of these states, fostered by the British as long as it suited their policies, helped to preserve a certain regional, feudal, and professional pride which—in all its precariousness—would be of great importance to Gandhi's original world-image. But it was of equal import that in the days of his youth the British rather abruptly concluded that these political and cultural conclaves had become expendable—and with them their prime ministers. But more about this later.

As is the custom in India, a joint family builds on (and in) wherever space permits, adding small rooms to accommodate the newlyweds of each generation. Thus small, stuffy, and darkened rooms are created, such as the "kitchenette," in which even two persons could hardly sit comfortably, and where mother Putali Ba passed her whole later life. It was in this room that Moniya was born. The lying-in bed was owned jointly and lent to whatever sub-family was in need of it. Behind this room was another apartment, even smaller. Here the grandmother lived with her sixth son, Tulsidas.

The oppressive narrowness of these appointments, however, was compensated for in good weather by open doors and court-yards, where the whole joint family would congregate on festive occasions and where on an ordinary day the prime minister's dinner guests would assemble—rarely fewer than twenty.

If Gandhi's mother is always described as an ideal housewife, "the first one to rise and the last to go to bed," eating only "when she could manage it," then it must be remembered that she, as well as her husband, emulated ancient models whose conduct was strictly regulated. And it should be immediately obvious that certain impressions recorded earlier regarding joint family life apply here: if the mother, for example, "never made any distinction between her own children and other children in the family . . .," then her children may at times have been forced to share more than they could afford emotionally. If they also learned "to live for, as well as in, mankind"—a felicitous phrase well applicable to the style of life Gandhi would later try to institute in his ashram—they did not learn it only from the mother. The father, Kaba Gandhi, had to look after the well-being of every member of his clan, whether they were ready to get married, settle down, or assume jobs. He is even said to have helped Putali Ba in household work:

> It was a familiar sight, which the people of Porbandar still remember, of him sitting in the Shrinathji temple day after day, peeling and paring the vegetables for his wife's kitchen, while he discussed with his visitors and officials affairs of the State.

The total image is one in which it is difficult to allocate masculine and feminine identifications.
One of the best and most instructive passages in Pyarelal's work describes the life of a joint family, for once stating bluntly the sources of bitter ambivalence:

... Where so many people with diverse tastes, habits, and temperaments are cooped up day and night in a narrow space from week to week, month to month, and year to year, it requires no little diplomatic skill, delicacy, tact, especially on the part of the head of the family, to maintain a healthy and sweet atmosphere. The members on their part have to develop the attitude of mutual help and regard, the capacity for give-and-take, and adjustment to one another's idiosyncrasies. A single tactless remark, a slip or oversight, an uncouth habit, heedlessness or disregard of another's feelings may set people's nerves on edge and make life hell for the whole family. Competition in this narrow world is keen; even the youngsters feel the edge of it; little things assume big proportions; the slightest suggestion of unfairness or partiality gives rise to petty rivalries, jealousies, and intrigues. To smooth them requires infinite patience, resourcefulness, and knowledge of human nature. Delicate and conscientious care in the minutiae of everyday life or its lack can make in the narrow confines of the joint family all the difference between peace and discontent, happiness and misery.

Undoubtedly, all this contributed to the style of living later created by Gandhi in his ashram: a life of mutual observation and intricate discipline hard to grasp and harder to condone for the uninitiated. If Putali Ba provided the ideal of womanhood later fostered in the ashram (and one could add facetiously, fostered in the men as well as in the women), then we must also acknowledge that the typical experience of joint family life may have helped the ashramites to find safety and inspiration in a style of living in parallel isolation and joint service.

A passionate founder and habitual head of ashrams, however (and who can imagine Gandhi ever as an inmate in somebody else's ashram), must have experienced a more complex early life in a joint family than was typical. And, indeed, Moniya seems to have had the capacity to insist on special relationships. No doubt being the last child of a young mother and an aging patriarch gave him a central place in the family and one conducive to "spoiling." He seems to have cultivated this advantage in developing that quality of tenacious and clever attachment which

made his parents feel that their relationship to him was a unique one and made him in turn, feel that his was the fate of an elect being. While he always felt relatively isolated in groups, his was the most intense search for one-to-one relationships, until in South Africa he found a professional and political style of being one-to-one with a community—of followers. Since, I believe, this is an important prerequisite for some styles of "greatness," we must try to envisage how a series of unique relationships was allocated, first to his mother and father, then to his child bride, and finally to his "evil" childhood friend—allocated each time with oppressive trust, intense conflict, and the eventual bitter insight of one who felt early that he was experimenting for extremely high stakes.

That, in his youth, Mohandas temporarily despaired of his uniqueness—a despair which was the model for repeated depressions in later life—should not blind us to the high probability that Moniya also harbored an early sense of originality and, in fact, superiority. For while our clinical era might see in his confessions only an admission of having been possessed by irrational guilt, the Mahatma does not stop there. He experimented, so he means to emphasize (and so, I believe, he was read by his countrymen), with the devils of shame and doubt, guilt and inferiority: he challenged them and won. And if we suspect that no great child would make sense without such a challenge, maybe we should go all the way in, say that no child would, and that greatness depends on the preservation and continued corroboration of something which most ex-children lose. But it is equally important to see that his parents had enough humor to "suffer" him to test them instead of spoiling the game by over-emphasizing the occasional sadism in his testiness. For a child is easily overcome by the fear of his own initiative and curiosity, while the native strength of his personality cannot as yet match the precocity of either his brashness or his sensitive conscience. Thus Moniya seems to have been lucky in the choice of his parents; and defeat came to Mohandas only when he faced in all too-young years the marital encounter with another and equally stubborn child.
Outstanding also, all his life, was Gandhi's locomotor restlessness and energy. It is said even of men and women whose greatness was grounded in the contemplative life (such as St. Francis or Kierkegaard) that nobody could keep up with their loco-motor velocity and vigor. Gandhi's enormous perambulatory vigor in later years is well known.*

The described closeness of elbow room and air in the Gandhi brothers' mansion would make this restlessness, paired with insatiable curiosity, a fortunate method of getting out and away, although this tendency in Gandhi imposed quite a job on those who were supposed to keep an eye on him while his mother was busy. His older sister seems to have been the chosen victim. When she was ninety, this sister described Moniya as "restless as mercury" and "full of curiosity." He would try to make friends with animals, sometimes by "twisting dogs' ears" and this apparently with such nonviolent cunning that he was never bitten. (One young man of my acquaintance still found it hard to forgive the Mahatma for having twisted his ear rather painfully, while a well-known photograph shows Pyarelal's niece as a baby not too happy with the fact that the Mahatma insisted on rubbing noses with her.) But it was good to get Moniya out of the house, for when his father was not there, he was inclined to usurp strange rights. He would remove the image of the ruling Prince from its customary stool and put himself in its place, a habit of pretending to be his father's master of which we shall make all we can. He also used to scatter the utensils of worship and to "write" on the floor. When his mother tried to forbid this, he (in Pyarelal's words) "stoutly dissented," in what may have been the ontogenetic origin of the sit-down. On the other hand, he strongly dissented also from any necessity of being watched outdoors. His sister says that she was told by their father to keep out of sight when watching Moniya, a consideration at variance with the assertion that the father wanted to squelch the child's adventuresomeness. When found high in a mango tree, Moniya gave an excuse which attests to an early combination, so characteristic of the mature Gandhi, of locomotor restlessness and the obsession for taking care of others: he was bandaging the mangoes, he explained.

But while he was playful and without fear when he could set his own pace, he proved uninterested in all organized games. For this he blamed his "shyness"; yet he did not hesitate to take the role of peacemaker when the playmates quarreled among themselves. This, Pyarelal says, was the "passion of his life." And, indeed, from his childhood in Rajkot to his maturity in Indian politics, he would never "play" unless he was in a position of such moral dominance that he could convince himself and others that the power game of his mediatorship was "for their own good." And (not unimportantly) it often turned out to be just that.

To convince parents of this while one is still a child, however, is a special feat. Yet it is not an uncommon one in uncommon men and women. The feat is that of maintaining the prerogative of a child and yet of first pretending to be and then actually becoming so nearly the parents' counterplayer in more and more serious encounters that one acquires their strengths through significant interplay. Whether or not, later on, one succeeds in doing the same with counterplayers in pursuits of ever-wider public importance—that eventually determines objective greatness.

Most interpreters emphasize Putali Ba's religious observance, if not obsession, and some insist on blaming her for Gandhi's propensity for fasting at critical moments. We will later discuss the many aspects of fasting in India (or anywhere) which range from the purest of self-purifying endeavors to pious and...
and self-abnegation. Putali Ba's children seem to have watched her anxiously.

... Once she vowed not to have food without seeing the sun. We children on those days would stand staring at the sky, waiting to announce the appearance of the sun to our mother. Everyone knows that at the height of the rainy season the sun often does not condescend to show his face. And I remember days when, at his sudden appearance, we would rush and announce it to her. She would run out to see with her own eyes, but by that time the fugitive sun would be gone, thus depriving her of her meal. "That does not matter," she would say cheerfully, "God did not want me to eat today." And then she would return to her round of duties.

On the other hand, she was an utterly undogmatic religious person of a kind who wished to pursue only what made her feel right and clean. Indeed, she imbued her little son with a tolerance for any religion as long as it cultivated a deep sense of communion with the unseen and silent. Moniya, in fact, seems to have had a kind of humorous understanding with his mother that some religious restrictions were a bit of bunk, teasing her, for example, by saying that on the way home from school he had touched an Untouchable and then admitting that he was just joking; or, more seriously, pestering her into giving him food on days when religious custom forbade it. He related to Pyarelal, I was my mother's pet child, first because I was the smallest of her children but also because there was nothing dearer to my heart than her service. My brothers were fond of play and frolic. I found not much in common with them. I had no close bond with my sister either. Play had absolutely no fascination for me in preference to my mother's service. Whenever she wanted me for anything, I ran to her.

Always when she needed him! Never an intimation that he may have needed a mother—never, that is, until in his seventies, not long before his assassination, when he would shiver at night so desperately that he would ask some of his women companions to lie down close to him and warm him. But even then he would proclaim it was all just to test his manhood—that is, in Indian terms, his capacity to control it so that he could use this vital essence to bolster his waning political power.
or in the Christian gospels, the essence of which he tried to resurrect in Eastern and modern terms, having as a child abhorred the missionaries about town. But as we shall see, a certain ambivalence would pervade those reforms in diet and daily living, which he would claim he "owed" to his mother, and which yet would betray in their exaggeration, in their coerciveness of others, and in their occasional self-destructiveness, a remnant of suppressed rebellion. But even the most glaringly neurotic aspects of all this must not blind us to his often successful attempts, born of his relation to his mother, to unite the feminine and the masculine aspects of religiosity—and to convey this unification to the masses. And Moniya, indeed, survives not only in the willfulness of later "experiments," but also in the deliberateness with which passing errors and even major mistakes are later sovereignly admitted—with a queer mixture of owning up to them and yet claiming them to have been experiments, as if part of a gigantic game. This at times must have had a manic quality, true counterpart to the depressive side of Gandhi's nature, which we shall discuss next. Gandhi, no doubt, had days when he acted gaily on a scale which would make his followers and adversaries gasp with awe and apprehension. But this does not exclude the other aspect, the Autobiography's over-conscientious side, from also being there rather early; the Auto-biography only authenticates the depressive trends which haunted the child no less than the pubertal boy, the youthful man no less than the aging autobiographer. These self-critical trends were to have sinister consequences aggravated by the man's tendency to dare himself and others; but it would be impossible to understand the Mahatma's stature and influence without knowing that he once was Moniya, and that the Moniya in him helped at strategic moments to free inner resources in himself and in his followers and to gauge, with a child's random sure-footedness, the actualities of the historical situation.

2. MOHAN AND HIS FATHER

There are photographs of Mohan, as he was then called, at the ages of thirteen and fifteen which are more easily reconciled with the Mahatma's description of his youth (and with the interpretations based on this description) than is the earlier image of Moniya. Yet Mohan seems so much stouter, so much more exquisitely put together than one would gather from the sum of the stories told about him by the Mahatma. Who can describe, who "analyze" such a young man? Straight and yet not stiff; shy and yet not withdrawn; intelligent and yet not bookish; willful and yet not stubborn; sensual and yet not soft: all of which suggests that integrity which is, in essence, unexplainable—and without which no explanation is valid. We must try to reflect on the relation of such a youth to his father, because the Mahatma places service to the father and the crushing guilt of failing in such service in the center of his adolescent turbulence. Some historians and political scientists seem to find it easy to interpret this account in psychoanalytic terms; I do not. For the question is not how a particular version of the Oedipal Complex "causes" a man to be both great and neurotic in a particular way, but rather how such a young person, upon perceiving that he may, indeed, have the originality and the gifts necessary to make some infantile fantasies come true in actuality, manages the complexes which constrain other men. This one cannot learn from Freud because he primarily described the co-science which inactivates ordinary people, and neglected to ask aloud (except, maybe, in a cryptic identification with Moses) what permits great men to step out of line. He was content to demonstrate the unconscious restoration of mastery over our inner complexes by nightly dreaming, but he neglected to dwell on the question of what additional mastery made it possible for him to understand his own dreams. This, like morality, he took for granted.

We have heard about the kind of prime minister's court which Moniya's father, administrator of one of the Kathiawar princes, held daily in his home in Porbandar. His profession and function, then, was no secret to the little boy, who playfully sat himself in the prince's place. And, indeed, for twenty-eight years of his life Karamchand, Gandhi (called Kaba) was an influential and, it seems, eminently respected man. The height of
his career coincided with Mohan's childhood and was reflected in a sovereign leniency toward his favorite son, which may have permitted the son to entertain benevolent fantasies of emulating him and yet to feel all the more guilty. But toward the end of Moniya's first childhood decade, his father was induced to leave Porbandar and the coast for Rajkot, in order to become the Prime Minister of the "Thakore" there—a more powerful potentate, it seems. Thus both the boy and the father lost their milieu; while, in addition, the father's career and health began to decline. The ruler of Rajkot was so imprudently proud of his new prime minister that he soon "lent" him to a neighboring ruler, who in turn proved so unreliable that Kaba left him within the year, not without declaring a hunger strike in order to be released. There is a story that on leaving, Kaba refused a generous monetary settlement because it did not correspond to the original terms. "You will not find another ruler who will offer you such a generous sum!" the prince exclaimed, to which Kaba replied: "And you will not find another Karbhari who is too proud to take it." The story is, somehow, Gandhian, if only in the pride of saying no. But it is of the fact that only a son with a higher education obtained in England would in the future be able to defend the rulers and their prime ministers against the British agents.

Even to begin to understand the child and the youth who was going to be Gandhi and the Mahatma—so I have indicated—it is necessary to assume that he emerged from the love and care of his relationship with his mother as one given to one intense relationship at a time and this a relationship of service, nay, possession of the other. When, as all children must, he had to abandon the fusion with his mother (in a joint family, as we saw, a most tenuous fusion at best), he could only relive, in line with his personal growth, a series of equally intense and yet "experimental" encounters with a selected cast of primary counter-

It was at his aging father's insistence, never to be forgiven by the son, that the family decided to combine Mohandas's marriage to Kasturba with the planned marriages of an older brother and of a nephew. Mohandas, then thirteen, had already been engaged by family contract for the third time. His first two fiancées had died, but he probably did not know or care to know of either their existence or their death. These were matters for the parents to settle, and Moniya had probably played for years with strong-willed Kasturba, who lived in the immediate neighborhood in Porbandar. The multiple marriage was contemplated primarily for economic reasons, but it also seems that the father wanted to be sure he would live to be present at Mohan's marriage. And as things developed, his presence became the central fact for Mohan, whose wedding picture shows him to be a rather scared boy. Yet, he is said to have enjoyed the proceedings to a point, while making it quite clear how far he would go in the usual ceremonial show: he was not, for example, going to be paraded through the streets on a decorated horse. Otherwise, he seems to have anticipated the more intimate companionship with his child wife as a mixture of exclusive playmateship and the total possession of (and service to) one who would belong to him by rights. The sexual act which he knew was expected of him could not have remained a secret under the living conditions of a joint family and the semirural closeness to animals around such provincial towns. Also, one was coached in such matters by solicitous relatives, and one could at any rate, as the Mahatma wrote, count
Gandhi's Truth

on knowing what to do from the knowledge acquired in previous lives—the Hindu counterpart of the concept of "instinct."

But if there was a tendency in the to-be-wed Mohan to enjoy the marriage playfully, this and the whole festive character of the occasion were marred by the fact that his father had a nearly fatal accident on the way to the wedding: a kind of curse in the son's life. The father's carriage overturned, and he was actually hurt more seriously than it at first seemed:

My father put on a brave face in spite of his injuries and took full part in the wedding. As I think of it, I can even today call before my mind's eye the place where he sat as he went through the different details of the ceremony. Little did I dream then that one day I should severely criticize my father for having married me as a child.12

These words betray the bridegroom's awareness of his father, maybe greater than that of his child bride. And, indeed, after their return home, he divided his intensely intimate attention between his wife and the care of his father. His skillful maternal attention to Kaba could now replace, as well as fuse with, his service to his mother, for it freed her from the nursing duties which otherwise would have had to supersede all else. But the Mahatma confesses to having thought of his wife when massaging his father and of his father when being with his wife, for it meant a neglect of his studies. No wonder that his account of his life suggests a certain frantic rush from one to the other, from wife to father and father to wife and to and from both, to and from school; and one may well assume this to be the model for later alternations between a manic mobility and a transitory settling down—always in the service of somebody or something that needed him. At any rate, a true account of Mohan's youth (and here good fiction would be truer than any composite of the tendentious "facts" available) would have to show him from day to day in the overlapping and yet also deeply conflicting duties of attending father, wife, and school and (the reader will be almost glad to hear of it) experimenting with a bit of juvenile delinquency as well.

Let us first dispose of school life, for it seems to have meant least to him. As Pyarelal puts it (and we know this of other boys of future prominence), "learning unrelated to life and its duties had little attraction for him." But I would also surmise that no teacher came on the scene to whom it was worth attaching himself with the intensity that would make any unique intimacy worthwhile. The Mahatma later made light of his teachers as well as of his school. Always willing to take the blame, however, he would simply call himself a mediocre student, who was "astonished" when he won prizes and scholarships and let it go at that—with one exception: when in the exigencies of school life, his moral character was in doubt.

But I very jealously guarded my character. The least little blemish drew tears from my eyes. When I merited, or seemed to the teacher to merit, a rebuke, it was unbearable for me.13

To remain unblemished, then, is described as the overweening emotional necessity; but beyond this the Mahatma documented (without admitting the slightest malice) how he taught one of his teachers a lesson. Once when the Educational Inspector visited the school, the teacher noticed a mistake on Mohandas's spelling sheet and, eager to present a perfect record, hinted to him somehow that he could copy the exact spelling from his neighbor.

... It was beyond me to see that he wanted me to copy the spelling from my neighbour's slate, for I had thought that the teacher was there to supervise us against copying. The result was that all the boys, except myself, were found to have spelt every word correctly. Only I had been stupid... Yet the incident did not in the least diminish my respect for my teacher. I was by nature blind to the faults of elders.14

One would like to subsume that much goodness on the part of a schoolboy under the formula that it was all part of the message the aging autobiographer meant to convey. But this, no doubt, would mean to neglect a lifelong trend which, in fact, found its climax in the Autobiography. This trend has its own developmental logic—a logic which Gandhi's life has in common with the lives of other saints. Here an overweening conscience can
find peace only by always believing that the budding "I" harbors a truthfulness superior to that of all authorities because this truth is the covenant of the "I" with God, the "I" being even more central and more pervasive than all parent images and moralities. This I would consider to be the core of a homo religiosus, and the burden of the story just told is not that Mohan was a good boy but that he dared to stand unprotected by frail authority between absolute evil and absolute truth. But such a boy often appears, of course, too good to be true. Pyarelal quotes (with a shudder not typical for a Gandhian writing about Gandhi) from a letter which the Mahatma wrote to his seventeen-year-old son Manilal many years later:

Fun and frolic are permissible only during one's years of innocence, i.e., up to the twelfth year. As soon as a child attains the age of discretion, he must learn to go about with a full sense of his responsibility and make a ceaseless, conscious effort to develop his character. . . . I remember when I was less than your age, my greatest joy was to nurse my father. I have not known what fun and frolic are since my twelfth year.\(^15\)

To judge such a statement, one would want to know the occasion which elicited it. And, of course, one would also want to know the traditional tone of paternal letters: for in the Hindu scheme of life one was supposed to be an ascetic student at seventeen, and therefore, as Gandhi says in the same letter, something comparable to a Sannyasin at least in the matter of refraining from all sensual levity. And we shall substantiate later that Gandhi's letters to his sons are often moralistic in a vindictive way, as though his sons had to be doubly good for having been the issue of that early marriage.

In the Autobiography the Mahatma recounts the myths and plays he remembers most intensely from his youth. Of all the holy pictures publicly displayed by itinerant showmen, it was the one of "Shravana carrying, by means of slings fitted for his shoulders, his blind parents on a pilgrimage" which left, he says, the most indelible impression on him. "Here is an example for you to copy," he reports having said to himself. But as if to atone for what vanity may have been suggested by the son's power, Shravana died, and "the agonized lament of the parents over Shravana's death is still fresh in my memory. The melting tune moved me deeply, and I played it on a concertina which my father had purchased for me." If the modern observer is inclined to see in this a sentimental denial of the wish to be stronger than his father, we must remember that not even Freud considered it desirable or possible that the Oedipus theme be conscious. In fact, to think that one can be conscious of it be-cause one now has a name for it could be a cheap substitute for suffering it through with all one's being and in terms of both ancestral mythology and changing technology.

At about that time, Mohan had secured his father's permission to see a play performed by a certain dramatic company. This play—\textit{Harishchandra}—captured my heart. I could never be tired of seeing it. But how often should I be permitted to go? It haunted me, and I must have acted \textit{Harishchandra} to myself times without number. "Why should not all be truthful like Harishchandra?" was the question I asked myself day and night. To follow truth and to go through all the ordeals Harishchandra went through was the one ideal it inspired in me. I \textit{literally believed} in the story of Harishchandra.\(^16\)

The story, in all brevity, concerns a king of uncommon goodness and virtue. The gods decide to test him. They send a Brahman to him who at first asks for alms, then for more and more. The king, true to his \textit{dharma}, gives him all he has including his kingdom. He becomes a slave and his wife leaves him, taking with her their son, who soon after dies. As a slave, Harishchandra is put in charge of the local cremation grounds. His wife reappears with the body of her son and requests cremation. Harishchandra, following his new \textit{dharma}, dutifully insists on the customary fee, which his wife cannot pay. She pleads with Harishchandra, "But he is your son!" But at last the gods intervene and restore to Harishchandra his kingship and his family. If we could understand what Gandhi meant by saying that he "literally believed" such a story we would come much closer to understanding him and his attitude toward his own history. In my own terms, I can only surmise that to him the

\* Italics mine.
parable had an intrinsic actuality much superior to any question of factual occurrence, while he later strove towards—and, indeed, succeeded in—living on the level of parables while engaged in the most concrete activities.

In reading the letter to his son, however, we realize with an additional shudder that the period of his disavowal of all "fun and frolic" includes all the years of his early marriage with that willful and playful young girl and, in fact, makes all his puerile and adolescent escapades a matter of deadly earnestness: was there ever an Antevasin, one is tempted to ask, whose apprenticeship was a more naked, a more lonely confrontation with the existential categories of sonhood, manhood, selfhood? Here another lifelong trend is indicated: while others may accept deprivations in order to be worthy of the support of traditional teachings and the sanction of certified teachers of the traditional, young Gandhi had to create a new tradition.

The nursing care of the father is pictured as the one endeavor superior to all other purpose: was this a parable in which the son not only atones for his own sins but also forgives the father for his too? For, no doubt, by forcing the son into an early marriage, Kaba had in a significant way upset something in the son's dharma. Gandhi's sexuality, by omission or commission, became permanently marred by what to him was juvenile excess, depleting his power of spiritual concentration. His wife, as long as they lived in lust and begot children, came to personify a threat to higher loyalties, even as all loss of semen was tradition ally perceived as a drain on a higher vitality. The strength of such tradition undoubtedly varied in different regions and castes and was vigorously counteracted in some with an almost obsessive erotic flourish. But that higher brain power is enhanced by the physical sexual substance which is lost in ejaculation but can be saved in continence and pumped up to the brain—that seems to be a traditional Indian model of a theory of sublimation. Where such imagery is dominant and some obsessive and phobic miserliness is added, as is universally the case in adolescents convinced that ejaculations are draining them, all sexual life assumes the meaning of depleting a man's essence. Here, then, Mohan faced a conflict which undermined all spontaneity and playfulness, even in a sexual life legitimized by convention and "ordered" by his father; and at the end only total abstinence could give back to him—and to his wife—the sense of humor which can mark the triumph of self-mastery.

Mohandas' child bride accepted his sexual demands, whatever their quality, intensity, or frequency really was, because that was a Hindu girl's lot. But in trying to absorb her into his adolescent black magic, he met his first (and many feel, lasting) master: her simplicity and dignity were not to be impaired. She was, he admitted, initially superior to him in physical courage and she remained unafraid, unyielding to his frantic efforts to make a more worthwhile human being out of her by teaching her to read and write. She would become the all-admired Ba, but never literate: and she could always, as Pyarelal puts it, "make him feel absurd . . . by just one simple, devastating home-truth for which she had a genius." But she managed gradually to assent to a life of sacrifice which she could not escape. Shankerlal asked her in her old age what had happened to her girlish desire for nice things to wear, and she said: "The most important thing in life is to choose one direction—and to forget the others." But, of course, she would never discuss the intimate aspects of her early marriage—not even, one gathers from some of Gandhi's remarks—with her husband. And from the Mahatma we have only unalleviated Augustinianisms. "If with this devouring passion there had not been in me a burning attachment to duty, I should either have fallen a prey to disease and premature death or have sunk into a burdensome existence." He congratulates himself and her on the fact that in India "the child wife spends more than half her time at her father's place," and he later considered his trip to England at the age of eighteen "a long and healthy spell of separation." How "passionate" such a boy or man really is becomes a moot question, for we can only know of the quantitative threat which he feels the need of confessing. But one thing is devastatingly certain: nowhere is there any suggestion of joyful intimacy. Later when he had given up all sexual activity, Gandhi obviously was able to find a certain
erotic-aesthetic gaiety in a kind of detached physical closeness to both women and men. But all genital desire remained a stigma and all yielding a catastrophes: which puts quite a burden on the children who are the accidental issue of such transgressions. As we shall see, this whole matter of Gandhi's fatherhood of natural and of spiritual sons came to a head in the very period of the Ahmedabad Event.

It must be obvious, by now, why much of Moniya's playful and mischievous teasing went sour in his adolescence. And yet I would not concede that his capacity for laughter became totally subdued just because the autobiographic chapters on his youth might as well have been entitled "Experiments with Sin." It probably is true for many, if not for all children, that truly childlike playfulness stops where play with the fire of sexuality begins, if for no other reason than for that factor which Anna Freud describes as the relative weakness of the adolescent ego in the face of pubertal pressure. But in Mohan's case, one suspects, it was the inability to reconcile the sexual demands of his early marriage with the overweening need to use those closest to him for moral encounters. Compared with that, the sexual act was nothing but humiliating contumescence, and in all his writings there is never a suggestion that even as a procreative experience sexual closeness could lift the intimacy between a man and a woman to the level of joyful generativity.

Clinically speaking, one can only conclude that Gandhi had to save his kind of playfulness, intimacy, and creativity from a sexuality which had offended him in the biblical sense and that he was fortunate in his capacity to derive eventually a sense of gaiety from plucking it out. But we shall see that some vindictiveness, especially toward woman as the temptress, survived in him and made him insist on absolute chastity as a necessary condition for leaders in nonviolence. There are good institutional reasons for making the love of ashramites or of the inmates of any holy order a love of brothers and sisters. But the disavowal of all phallicism offers only two avenues of sublimation: a transcendence to a "higher" plane of all that is playfully and yet forcefully aggressive and intrusive about the

joyful use of the phallus (and this, no doubt, Gandhi would transfer to the more provocative phases of his nonviolent approach); and a regressive emphasis on the eliminative character of detumescence, and an obsessive insistence on cleanliness. Here a life-giving substance is reduced to the status of a dirty and dirtying one which must be contained and counteracted by avoidance and purification. This has powerful and yet highly contradictory antecedents in Indian tradition, and there is no doubt that Gandhi's fanatic dislike of filth and contamination eventually served to direct public attention to the fatal carelessness of Indians in matters of human waste: for acts of spiritual purification can coincide (as in the Ganges) with a total recklessness in matters of hygiene.

One should not rush, then, to interpret such notions as mere products of a personal and neurotic quirk. The question must be recognized as an age-old one: For the sake of what goals, and by what methods, will man learn to contain his excess of instinctual activity? And interestingly enough, The Story of My Experiments with Truth, no less than The Interpretation of Dreams, assumes that in order to make sexuality amenable to mastery by either "experiment" or "analysis," a man must confront his childhood and, above all, give an account of his conflicts with his father.

3. THE CURSE

The first and only childhood item reprinted in Gandhi's Collected Works is a letter which he wrote at the age of fifteen in order to confess to his unsuspecting father the fact that he "had removed a bit of gold from his brother's armlet to clear a small debt of the latter." According to his sister's account (as told to Pyarelal when she was ninety), he first confessed to his mother, who said: "Go and tell your father." "Would father thrash me for this?" he asked. "He won't," the mother replied, "why should he? Has he ever done so?" This, if correctly remembered, at least confirms that the otherwise short-tempered father never laid hands on this boy. Gandhi himself continues:
I decided at last to write out the confession, to submit it to my father, and to ask his forgiveness. I wrote it on a slip of paper and handed it to him myself. In this note not only did I confess my guilt, but I asked adequate punishment for it, and closed with a request to him not to punish himself for my offence. I also pledged myself never to steal in future.

I was [my hand was] trembling as I handed the confession to my father. He was then suffering from a fistula and was confined to bed. His bed was a plain wooden plank. I handed him the note and sat opposite the plank.

He read it through, and pearl drops trickled down his cheeks, wetting the paper. For a moment he closed his eyes in thought and then tore up the note. He had sat up to read it. He again lay down. I also cried. I could see my father's agony. If I were a painter, I could draw a picture of the whole scene today. [Even today] it is still so vivid in my mind. [The love arrow of] those pearl drops of love cleansed [pierced] my heart and washed my sin away—[I became pure]. Only he who has experienced such love can know what it is. As the hymn says: "Only he who is smitten with the arrows of love [Rama] knows its power."

This was, for me an object-lesson in Ahimsa. Then I could read [see] in it nothing more than a father's love, but today I know that it was pure Ahimsa. When such Ahimsa becomes all-embracing, it transforms everything it touches. There is no limit to its power. [It is hard to measure this power.]

This sort of sublime forgiveness was not natural [basically unnatural] to my father. I had thought that he would be angry, say hard things, and [probably] strike his forehead. But he was so wonderfully peaceful, and I believe this was due to my clean confession.

A clean confession, combined with a promise never to commit the sin again, when offered before one who has the right to receive it, is the purest type of repentance. I know that my confession made my father feel absolutely safe about me and increased his affection for me beyond measure. 19

My italics mark those passages in which the son, at the age of fifteen, is exquisitely aware of his power to induce in his father an extraordinary state of mind. If such "sublime forgiveness" was "basically unnatural" to his father and if the whole matter nevertheless turns out to be "an object-lesson in Ahimsa," then it is the son who with the spiritual will embodied in his "clean confession" purified the father. For old Kaba did not hit his son (something he seems to have done quite "naturally" to others), nor did he "take the punishment upon himself" by hitting him-self on the forehead—an Indian custom which can be most re-sounding and utterly disconcerting to all within earshot. Instead, there was peace. All of which is emphasized here not only for its intrinsic importance in the development of Gandhi's sense of a superior destiny but also because the story has a certain "typical ring"—a resonance with the lives of other leading individuals with a premature conscience development and an early assumption of moral responsibility for a parent—a responsibility which they subsequently extended to mankind itself.

It seems fitting here to digress in the service of one of the dimensions of biographic interpretation. Even an item as idiosyncratic as Mohan's confession can be fruitfully compared with analogous items in the lives of comparable figures of world history, thus revealing a "typical" experience at least among those who write autobiographies. Let me offer for consideration two items from widely different settings.

Here is a famous passage from Kierkegaard:

Once upon a time there lived a father and a son. Both were very gifted, both witty, particularly the father. . . . On one rare occasion, when the father looking upon his son saw that he was deeply troubled, he stood before him and said: poor child, you go about in silent despair. (But he never questioned more closely, alas he could not, for he himself was in silent despair.) Otherwise, they never exchanged a word on the subject. Both father and son were, perhaps, two of the most melancholy men in the history of man. And the father believed that he was the cause of the son's melancholy, and the son believed that he was the cause of the father's melancholy, and so they never discussed it. . . . And what is the meaning of this? The point precisely is that he made me unhappy—but out of love. His error did not consist in lack of love but in mistaking a child for an old man. 20

Again, I have italicized the phrases which illustrate what I have in mind, namely, that such encounter is possible only where the father-son relationship has assumed a very special peculiarity. In a patriarchal era a son with a precocious conscience and a deep sense of superior mission could, while still a child, feel spiritually equal to—nay responsible for—a father who, by his own desperate neediness, made it impossible for the boy to hate him. I
would venture to suggest that certain kinds of greatness have as an early corollary a sense that a parent must be redeemed by the superior character of the child, and we shall see presently what "sin" it was that Mohandas felt he had to redeem in his father.

But in order to indicate the whole range of this problem, we will shift the scene radically to the autobiography of a woman and modern American and a bearer of a quite different kind of greatness. In Eleanor Roosevelt's life the overweening theme of owing maternal care to all of mankind, as well as to special groups and individuals, manifested itself most decisively and most proudly in the support which she, a previously most undecisive young woman, determined to bestow on her stricken husband. Here is the account of Eleanor's last meeting with her father.

... I remember going down into the high ceilinged dim library on the first floor of the house in West 37th Street. He sat in a big chair. He was dressed all in black, looking very sad. He held out his arms and gathered me to him. In a little while he began to talk, to explain to me that my mother was gone, that she had been all the world to him, and now he only had my brothers and myself, that my brothers ... together and do many things which he painted as interesting and pleasant to be looked forward to in the future together.

Somehow it was always he and I. I did not understand whether my brothers were to be our children or whether he felt that they would be at school and college and later independent.

There started that day a feeling which never left me—that he and I were very close together, and some day would have a life of our own together. He told me to write to him often, to be a good ... to study hard, to grow up into a woman he could be proud of, and he would come to see me whenever it was possible.

When he left, I was all alone to keep our secret of mutual understanding and to adjust myself to my new existence.

On August 14, 1894, just before I was ten years old, word came that my father had died. My aunts told me, but I simply refused to believe it, and while I wept long and went to bed still weeping, I finally went to sleep and began the next day living in my dream world as usual.

My grandmother decided that we children should not go to the funeral, and so I had no tangible thing to make death real to me. From that time on I knew in my mind that my father was dead, and yet I lived with him more closely, probably, than I had when he was alive."

Here it must be added that her father was an alcoholic and had been put away for years in a sanitarium. He was, in fact, permitted to see his daughter only on singular occasions—such as that of the mother's death. Yet here too the image of the guilty and suffering parent becomes an indelible secret possession and a source of a lifelong and very special strength. In a biographic study Joan Erikson makes a convincing case of it that Elea-nor, as the wife of FDR, suddenly lost all her shy undecisiveness when she realized that her husband, then crippled by infantile paralysis, was to be put away, as her father had been at a time when she had been too young to prevent it. Thus Eleanor became great as a president's nurse, companion, and helper and later as a principal trustee of his spiritual-political estate and a co-author of the UN charter of human rights.

In the case of a maternal son, the element of ambivalence looms, of course, very much larger wherever the son is fanatically preoccupied with the care (physical or spiritual) of the father. And, indeed, at the very beginning of his Autobiography, Gandhi refers to his father not only as short-tempered (and we have seen how the son cured him of that) but also as possibly "given to carnal pleasures." For the father's marriage to his mother had been his fourth: and he had married the eighteen-year-old girl when he was already forty. Gandhi records that his father had lost all previous wives by death, but this does not seem to be correct: his third wife was, in fact, still alive, although hopelessly invalid, when Gandhi's father married Putali Ba—a not altogether negligible circumstance in a gossipy community's view of a prime minister's life. It may, in fact, have weighed heavily on Putali Ba. At any rate, that Gandhi, the master of Brahmacarya, on the first page of his Autobiography refers to his father as possibly oversexed, and this because he married his mother and fathered him, is a rather fundamental statement of the generational dilemma. For it contains, I believe, the further accusation that the father, by insisting on the son's
early marriage, had cursed the son with his own carnal weakness—certainly a powerful ontogenetic argument for the Augus-
tinian stigma of primal sin. Kaba, by exposing his son to sexuality so early, also made him a father before the son could know what he was doing. Kierkegaard, like many a man devoted to the problem of existence as such, thanked God for the fact that He had saved him from becoming a father. If the Mahatma's eldest son would eventually take exquisite revenge on his father by dying a destitute's death, we recognize in Gandhi's life a son-father and father-son theme of biblical dimensions.

This will prepare us for the second, final, and fatal encounter with the father which the Mahatma recorded with such devastating vividness in his Autobiography. It has been quoted so often and overinterpreted so much that I cannot bring myself to reprint it yet again in full. Enough: One night his sick father was fast sinking; but the young son left the nursing care to the father's favorite brother and went to his bedroom to join his (then pregnant) wife. After a while, however, somebody came to fetch him. Rushing to the sickroom, he found that his father had died in the uncle's arms—"a blot," Gandhi writes, "which I have never been able to efface or to forget." A few weeks later his wife aborted.

This experience represents in Gandhi's life what following Kierkegaard, I have come to call "the curse" in the lives of spiritual innovators with a similarly precocious and relentless conscience. It is indicative of an aspect of childhood or youth which comes to represent an account that can never be settled and remains an existential debt all the rest of a lifetime. But it must be clear that one single episode cannot be the cause of such a curse; rather, the curse is what we clinicians call a "cover memory," that is, a condensation and projection of a pervasive childhood conflict on one dramatized scene. In individual cases this may seem to be the cause in childhood of a set of dangerous and pathogenic developments in later life; but we may do well to ask what the propensity for such dramatization may mean in phylogenetic development. A dark preoccupation with the death of the old seems unavoidable in a species which must live

through a period of infantile dependence unequalled in length elsewhere in nature, which develops a sensitive self-awareness in the very years of immaturity, and which becomes aware of the inexorable succession of generations at a stage of childhood when it also develops the propensity for intense and irrational guilt. To better the parent thus means to replace him; to survive him means to kill him; to usurp his domain means to appropriate the mother, the "house," the "throne." If such guilt is, as religions claim, of the very essence of revelation, it is still a fateful fact that mankind's Maker is necessarily first experienced in the infantile image of each man's maker.

This curse, clinical theory would suggest, must be heir to the Oedipus conflict. In Gandhi's case the "feminine" service to his father would have served to deny the boyish wish to replace the (aging) father in the possession of the (young) mother and the youthful intention to outdo him as a leader in later life. Thus the pattern would be set for a style of leadership which can defeat a superior adversary only nonviolently and with the express intent of saving him as well as those whom he oppressed. Some of this interpretation, in fact, corresponds to what the Mahatma would have unhesitatingly acknowledged as his conscious intention.

It is of little help, then, to submit Gandhi's confession to such pseudo-clinical formulations as that "Gandhi in his inner being was quite the reverse of the filial model he defends in his Autobiography." This is too nonspecific an assertion to explain the magnitude of his confessed conflict—and what he did with it. It purports to unmask something which Gandhi, in fact, was aware of to a fault. The question is, rather, why certain men of genius can do no less than take upon themselves an evolutionary and existential curse shared by all, and why other men will be only too eager to ascribe to such a man a god-given greatness surpassing that of all others.

The question is a threefold one: how does the child and the youth come to develop the capacity to take on such a fate, and the man, the determination to honor it; what motivation makes the multitudes wait for such a man, eager to consider him holy;
and how does he learn to make their motivation and his con- verge
in events which release creative, as well as destructive, energies of
great magnitude?

While Gandhi's Autobiography pictures him as a child and as a
youth totally obsessed with matters of guilt and purity and as a
failure in the ways of the world, he, of course, "somehow" acquired
at the same time superior powers of observation as well as an
indomitable determination. But I believe that just because
Mohandas was early (if only darkly) aware of the unlimited horizon
of his aspiration, his failure to preside mercifully over his father's
death and thus to receive a lasting sanction for his superior gifts was,
indeed, the curse of his life. But this, as we saw, is (typically) a
shared curse, for if "carnal weakness" was to blame, it was the
father's weakness which had become the son's.

The ontogenetic version of this childhood curse remains fateful.
The theme of nursing a stricken (and ambivalently loved) superior
adversary reappears in Gandhi's later life both literally and
symbolically. We shall meet it in the role of one who twice, although
an adversary of British policy, recruits for an ambulance corps in
support of British war efforts when the Empire was in danger. And
we shall find it in the conviction of the Satyagrahi that in fighting
nonviolently, he is really taking care of his adversary's soul and its
latent "truth."

Yet this theme of nursing a stricken father, too, must and can be
seen in historical perspective. One would not wish to overdo the
parallel, but it is thought-provoking that in Freud's reported dreams
the conviction of having been of medical assistance to his dying
father looms large as a dream-wish counteracting his guilt over his
medical ambitions.