YOU PROBABLY remember that, last month, we made two observations.

The first is that thought is a living, active, autonomous entity.

The second is that in order to contend victoriously with the injurious effects of the polluted mental atmosphere in which we live, we must build up within ourselves a pure, luminous and powerful intellectual synthesis.

For this purpose we must bring down into ourselves the highest thoughts within our reach, that is, within the field of our mental activity, and make them our own.

But since thoughts are living beings, they have, as we do, their likes and dislikes, their attractions and repulsions.

We must therefore adopt a special attitude towards them, treat them as people, make advances and concessions to them and show them the same attentions as we would to someone we would wish to be our friend.

On this matter, a modern philosopher writes:

“Sometimes thinkers in their meditations, explorers and prospectors of the intellectual world in their discoveries, and poets — the diviners of thought — in their dreams, feel and vaguely sense that the idea is not something abstract and bodiless. It appears to them to be winged, something which soars, comes close and flees, denies and gives itself, something which must be called, pursued and won.

“To the most clairvoyant, the idea seems to be an aloof person with her whims and desires, her preferences, her queenly disdain, her virgin modesty. They know that it takes much care to win her and but a little thing to lose her, that there is a love of the mind for the idea, a love made of consecration and sacrifice, and without this the idea cannot belong to it.
“But these are pretty symbols, and few indeed can perceive the very precise reality which lies beneath them.

“It needed a Plato to identify this thing which lives and vibrates, which moves and shines, travels and is propagated through time and space, which acts and wills and freely chooses its own time and place — in short, to know the Idea as a being.”

Let us take especially one phrase from this beautiful page:

“There is a love of the mind for the idea, a love made of consecration and sacrifice, and without this the idea cannot belong to it.”

This is not an image. To enter into an intimate and conscious relation with the idea, we must consecrate ourselves to it, love it with a disinterested love, in itself, for itself.

Today we shall try to find out what this love consists of and, at the same time, what we must do for it to blossom within us.

The first attitude to be taken, the most indispensable, is the most perfect mental sincerity it is within our power to acquire.

Of all sincerities, this is perhaps the most difficult. Not to deceive oneself mentally is not an easy thing to achieve.

First of all we have, as I explained to you last December, a certain habit of thought which comes from the education we have received, from the influence of the environment, and which is most often made up of social conventions and collective suggestions. This habit naturally makes us give a far better reception to all the thoughts which are similar, if not conformable, to those which already fill our minds, than to those which could, to however small an extent, unsettle this mental structure.

For the same reason, as you probably remember, it is sometimes so difficult for us to learn to think for ourselves: we hesitate to change anything whatsoever in our customary way of thinking, which is most often made up of social conventions and collective suggestions. For our whole existence is based upon this habit. It takes a great courage and a great love of progress to consent to examine one’s existence in the light of thoughts that are deeper, and consequently more independent of the customs and usages of the environment.
You can judge from this the great, the very great love of the idea that is needed to achieve such a revolution in one’s habits, for the sole purpose of gaining the power to enter into a more intimate, more conscious relationship with it!

And even when our mental synthesis is made up of thoughts that we have received and made our own in the course of a constant and persevering effort of meditation, we must love the idea with a very powerful love, perhaps even more powerful still, so that we may always be in quest of a new idea, ready to give it the most eager reception if it is willing to come to us. For we are well aware that each new idea will constrain us to modify our synthesis, relegate to the background ideas which had seemed to us master-ideas, bring to the light other ideas too long disregarded, rearrange them all so that they do not clash, to the great detriment of our brain, in brief, a long and sometimes painful task. Indeed we are very seldom disinterested with regard to ideas; there are some which we prefer to others and which, consequently, occupy a place in our mental activity which they do not always deserve.

And if we must replace them with others that are more precise, more true, we often hesitate long before doing so, we cling to them as indispensable friends, and we love their defects as well as their qualities, — which is the worst way to love people, as well as the laziest and most selfish, — for we are always more highly esteemed by those we flatter than by those from whom we demand a constant effort of progress. But our difficulties do not stop there.

As a consequence of the intellectual education we have received or of some personal preference, we are also prejudiced about the way, or ways, in which ideas should be introduced to us.

These preconceptions are so many veritable superstitions that we must overcome.

They are different for each person.

Some people have the superstition of the book. For an idea
to merit consideration in their eyes, it must have been expressed in some famous book, in one of the bibles of humanity, and any thought coming in any other way will appear suspect to them.

There are some who accept an idea only from the official sciences, and those who recognise one only in the established religions, old or new. For others, the idea must come from the mouth of a man of renown with enough honorary titles so that none can question his value.

Still others, more sentimental, in order to come into contact with thought, need a master who should be the perfect incarnation of the ideal human standard constructed by their imagination. But they are bound to be sorely disappointed, for they forget that they alone are capable of realising their own ideal, that the one in whom they have placed their confidence has a duty to realise his own ideal which, consequently, however great it may be, may very well differ considerably from their own. So, most often, when they become aware of these divergences, since they had attached themselves to the ideas only for the sake of the man, they will reject both man and ideas together.

This is absurd, for ideas are worth what they are worth regardless of the individuals who have expressed them.

Finally, there is a whole category of people enamoured of the miraculous, who will recognise a truth only if it has come to them clothed in the mystery of a supramundane revelation, in dream or trance.

For them the master must be their God, an angel or a Mahatma, and give them his precious teachings during their contemplation or their sleep.

Needless to say, this method is still more unreliable than the others. That a thought should reach us by extraordinary means is no guarantee of its correctness or its truth.¹

¹ Paragraph added when this talk was presented to a different group: I do not mean that it is impossible to come into contact with an idea by these means, but they are far from being the only ones or even perhaps the best.
You see, the true lover of the idea knows that by seeking it ardently he will find it everywhere, and even more so in the subterranean and secret fountainheads than in those which have lost their pristine purity by turning into rivers that are majestic and renowned but also polluted by the waste of all kinds which they carry with them.

The lover of the idea knows that it can come to him from the mouth of a child as from the mouth of a learned man.

And it is even in this unexpected way that it can reach him most often.

That is why it is said: “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings comes forth truth.”

For if the thought of a child cannot have the precision of the thought of a man, neither does it have the fixity which results from laziness of habit and which in the adult prevents the thought from expressing itself whenever it does not belong to the categories which are familiar to him.

Moreover, it was to escape the distortion of an environment made up of habit and fixity that the schools of ancient times where the young prophets were educated were established far from the cities.

That is also why the great instructors of men began their apprenticeship in solitude. For if too many things are absent for the thought to be able to express itself in the minds of unrefined men, too many things are also absent from the mind of the cultivated man shaped by the artificial life of human societies.

How much silence is needed — not the outer, illusory and momentary silence, but on the contrary the true, profound, integral, permanent silence — to be able to hear the far-off voices of thought!

That is why the sincere lover of knowledge also knows that the greatest sages are always the most modest and the most unknown. For one who has the knowledge and the capacity prefers silence and retirement where he is free to accomplish his
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work without being disturbed by anything, to the fanfares of glory which would throw him as fodder to men.

The lover of thought knows that he will find thought everywhere around him, in the little flower as in the radiant sun; nothing and no one appears to him too humble or too obscure to be for him an intermediary of the idea he is ever seeking.

But above all he knows that the best, the most reliable contact with the idea is certainly a direct contact.

Since we are made out of the universal substance, we are this universe in miniature.

Since no phenomenon can exist without a corresponding medium, the existence of ideas implies the existence of a corresponding domain, the realm of free intelligence always in form but not subject to form, and this realm is within us as within the great universe.

If then we concentrate sufficiently, if we become conscious of our inmost being, we shall come into contact, within it and through it, with the free universal intelligence, the world of ideas.

Then, if we have taken care to polish our mirror well and to clear it of all the dust of preconception and habit, all ideas will be able to reflect themselves there with a minimum of distortion, and we shall have acquired bodhi (knowledge), we shall have acquired the power of reflecting the rays of the Sun of Truth — such was the hope which Siddhartha Gautama held out to us. When he was asked, “How shall we obtain bodhi?”, he would reply:

“Bodhi has no distinctive signs or marks: what can be known in respect of it is of no use whatsoever; but the care

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2 In a version presented to another group the paragraph ends here and is followed by these two paragraphs:

Then will our mental actions take on their full power and effectivity. Our thought-formations will become useful and luminous messengers going forth to do their work of goodness and harmony wherever material circumstances prevent us from doing it physically.

And by a little effort of concentration we shall rapidly succeed in becoming conscious of these actions while at the same time remaining in touch with the emanated thought.

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we take in practising its spirit is of great importance. It is like a cleansed and polished mirror that has become clear and bright, so that images are reflected in it sharply and vividly.”

And again:

“One who is without darkness, free from blemish, of blameless conduct, perfectly pure, that one, even though he does not know and has never heard and in short has no knowledge, however little, of any of the things that are in the world of the ten regions since time without beginning until today, none the less, he possesses the highest knowledge of the one who knows all. He is the one of whom it is said: Clarity.” You see here a panegyric of the direct relationship with the idea as opposed to the wholly external and superficial method of erudition.

The advantages of this direct relationship are incalculable.

It enables us to recover and love the idea behind all appearances, all veils, all forms, even the most barbarous, the most crude, the most superstitious.

Thus we can put into living practice the state of mind of the sage, of which I spoke to you in my first talk and which a master defines in this way:

“One who advances in Truth is not troubled by any error, for he knows that error is the first effort of life towards truth.”

Consequently, not a single fragment of an idea can ever be lost for us; wherever it is concealed, we know how to discover and cherish it.

Moreover, when we have become familiar with an idea, when we know it in itself, for itself, we recognise it behind the most diverse appearances, the most varied forms.

This faculty can even serve as a criterion to discover whether someone is in contact with the idea itself, that is to say, whether he has understood it well and made it his own or whether he is part of the mass of those who have assimilated as best they could a doctrine, a special language, and who can think only in the words of that language — outside this formula, they no longer understand anything.
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This attachment to form, which consists entirely of intellectual impotence, is one of the most powerful causes of dissension among men.

But one who penetrates deeply enough to see the thought, the naked truth, soon realises that it is the same behind its varied and more or less opaque veils.

This is the surest way to achieve true tolerance.

Indeed, how can we have an exclusive passion for one particular doctrine or school or religion when we have had the experience that each one of them contains treasures of light and truth, however varied the caskets which enclose them?

16 February 1912