

# 'The Story of My Experiment With Truth'

BY—M. K. GANDHI

## CHAPTER V.

### School-Days Recalled

I have already said that I was learning at the High School when I was married. All of us three brothers were learning at the same school. The eldest brother was in a much higher class, and the elder brother who was married at the same time as I, was only one class ahead of me. Marriage resulted in both of us wasting a year. The result was even worse for my brother. He gave up studies altogether. Heaven knows how many youths suffer the same plight as he. Only in the present Hindu society can studies and marriage go together.

My studies were continued. I was not regarded as a dunce at the High School. I always enjoyed the affection of the teachers. Certificates of boys' progress and character used to be sent to the parents every year. I never had a bad certificate. I even won prizes after I passed out of the second standard and in the fifth and sixth I had scholarships of Rs. four and ten for which I have to thank good luck more than my own merit. For the scholarships were not open to all, but reserved for the best boys amongst those coming from the Sorath Division of Kathiawar. And in those days there could not have been many boys from Sorath in a class of forty to fifty boys.

### DISLIKE FOR GYMNASTICS

My own recollection is that I had not any high regard for my ability. I used to be astonished whenever I won prizes and scholarships. But I very jealously guarded my character. The least little blemish drew tears from my eyes. Anything I merited, or seemed to the teacher to merit, his rebuke was unbearable for me. I remember having once got corporal punishment. I did not so much mind it, as the fact that I was considered to have deserved it.

I wept piteously. That was when I was in the first or second standard. There is another incident of the time when I was in the seventh standard. Dorabji Edulji Gimi was the headmaster then. He was popular among boys, as he was a disciplinarian, a man of method and a good teacher. He had made gymnastics and cricket compulsory for boys of the upper standards. And I disliked both, I never took part in any exercise, cricket or football, before they were made compulsory. My shyness was one of the reasons of my aloofness, which I now see was wrong. I then had the wrong notion that gymnastics had nothing to do with education. To-day I know that physical training should have as much place in the curriculum as mental training.

I may however mention that I was none the worse for abstaining from exercise. That was because I had read in books the benefits of long walks in the open air, and having liked the advice I formed a habit of taking walks which has still remained with me. These walks gave me a fairly hardy constitution.

And the reason of my dislike of gymnastics was my keen desire to serve as nurse to my father. As soon as the school closed, I would get back home and begin serving father. Compulsory exercise came in the way of the service. I requested Mr. Gimi to exempt me from gymnastics so that I might be free for this service but he would not listen to me. Now it so happened that on a Saturday when we had our school in the morning, I had to go to the school for gymnastics from home at 4 o'clock in the evening. I had no watch, and the clouds deceived me. Before I reached the school the boys had all left. The next day Mr. Gimi examining the roll found me marked absent. Being asked the reason for absence, I told him what had happened. He refused to believe me and ordered me to pay a fine of one or two annas (I now forget how much). I was convicted of lying! That deeply pained me. How was I to prove my innocence? There was no way. I cried in deep anguish. I saw that a man of truth must also be a man of

carefulness. This was the first and last instance of my carelessness in school. I have a faint recollection that I succeeded in the end in getting exemption from the fine,

### NEGLECT OF HANDWRITING

The exemption from exercise was, of course obtained, my father having written to the Headmaster that he wanted me at home after school. But though I was none the worse for having neglected exercise, I am still paying the penalty of another neglect. I do not know whence I got the notion that good handwriting was not a necessary part of education, but I retained it quite until I went to England. When later, especially in South Africa, I saw the beautiful handwriting of lawyers and young men born and educated in South Africa, I was ashamed of myself and repented of my neglect. I saw that bad handwriting should be regarded as a sign of an imperfect education. I tried later to improve my handwriting, but it was too late. I could never repair the neglect of my youth. Let every young man and woman be warned by my example, and understand that good handwriting is a necessary part of education. I am now of opinion that children must first be taught the art of drawing before learning how to write. Let the child learn his letters by observations as he does different objects, birds, etc., and let him learn handwriting only after he has learnt to draw objects. He will then write a beautifully formed hand.

### INTEREST IN GEOMETRY

Two more reminiscences of my school days are worth recording. I had lost one year because of my marriage and the teacher wanted me to make good the loss by skipping a class—a privilege usually allowed to industrious boys. I therefore had only six months in the third standard and was promoted to the fourth after the examinations which are followed by the summer vacation. English became the medium of instruction

in more subjects from the fourth standard. I found myself completely at sea. Geometry was a new subject in which I was not particularly strong and the English medium made it more difficult for me. The teacher taught the subject very well, but I could not follow him. Often would I lose heart and think of going back to the third standard, feeling the packing of two years' studies in one as too ambitious. But that would not only discredit me, but the teacher, who counting on my industry had recommended my promotion. So the fear of the double discredit kept me to my post. As, however, with much effort I reached the thirteenth proposition of Euclid, the utmost simplicity of the subject was suddenly revealed to me. A subject which required a pure and simple use of one's reasoning could not be difficult. Ever since Geometry became easy and interesting for me.

### TAKING TO SANSKRIT

Sanskrit however proved a tougher job. In Geometry there was nothing to memorise, whereas in Sanskrit, I thought, everything had to be mugged up. This subject also was commenced from the fourth standard. As soon as I entered the sixth I threw up the sponge. The teacher was a hard task-master anxious, as I thought, to stuff too much into the boys. There was a sort of rivalry going on between the Sanskrit and the Persian teachers. The Persian teacher was temperate. Boys used to talk among themselves that Persian was very easy and the Persian teacher very good and considerate to the students. The easiness tempted me and one day I sat in the Persian class. The Sanskrit teacher was grieved. He called me to his side and said : 'How can you forget that you are the son of a Vaishnava father ? Won't you learn the language of your religion ? If you have any difficulty, why not come to me ? I want to teach you students Sanskrit to the best of my ability. As you proceed further, you will find in it things of absorbing interest. You should not lose heart. Come and sit again in the Sanskrit class.' This shamed me. I could

not disregard the teacher's affection. To-day I cannot but think with gratitude of Krishnashanker Pandya. For if I had not acquired the little Sanskrit that I did then, I would have found it difficult to take any interest in our sacred books. In fact I deeply regret that I could not acquire more Sanskrit, as I learnt later that no Hindu boy or girl should be without a sound knowledge of Sanskrit.

### PLACE OF LANGUAGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

I now think that in all Indian curricula of higher education there should be a place for Hindi, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and English, besides of course the Vernacular. This big list need not frighten any one. If our education was more systematic and the boys free from the burden of having to learn their subjects in a foreign medium, I am sure, learning all these languages would not be a task, but a perfect pleasure. A scientific knowledge of one language makes a knowledge of other languages very easy.

Really speaking Hindi, Gujarati and Sanskrit may be regarded as one language, and Persian and Arabic also as one. Though Persian and Sanskrit belong to a different family of languages from Arabic and Hebrew, there is a close relationship between Persian and Arabic as both claim their growth through the same source, viz, the rise of Islam. Urdu I have not regarded as a distinct language because it has adopted Hindi grammar and its vocabulary is mainly Persian and Arabic, and he who would learn good Urdu must learn Persian and Arabic, as one who would learn good Gujarati, Hindi, Bengali, or Marathi, must learn Sanskrit.

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