

**THE SADHU: A STUDY IN  
MYSTICISM AND  
PRACTICAL RELIGION.  
[LONDON-1921]**

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# THE SADHU

A STUDY IN MYSTICISM AND  
PRACTICAL RELIGION

BY

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	vii
I. THE MAN AND HIS MAKING . . . . .	1
In Quest of Peace—Convert and Sadhu—The Achievement of Maturity—World Fame.	
II. A MYSTIC'S CREED . . . . .	49
A Christocentric Mysticism—The Trinity: a Vision—The Incarnation—The Atonement— Mystical Union with Christ.	
III. A MYSTIC'S PEACE . . . . .	69
The Peace of God—The Philosophy of the Cross —The Dark Night of the Soul.	
IV. A MYSTIC'S WAY . . . . .	84
The Mystic and the Plain Man—Renunciation and Active Service—The Nature of Prayer—The Necessity of Prayer—Devotional Habits—The Beginner's Way.	
V. ECSTASY AND VISION . . . . .	109
Esoteric Character—Visions of the Jewish Seers— Heaven—The Resurrection of the Body—The Last Judgement—Hell—Other Visions—The Nature of the Ecstatic State—An Unique Phenomenon—The Idea and its Symbol—Divine Guidance—The Authority of the Church—The Dangers of Ecstasy.	

	PAGE
VI. SUFFERING, SIN AND JUDGEMENT . . . . .	157
Karma — Suffering — Sin — Repentance — Judgement.	
VII. THE HEART AND THE HEAD . . . . .	179
A Reaction against Intellectualism—The Function of Intellect—Vain Enquiry—The Moral Obstacle—Knowledge of Christ.	
VIII. NATURE AND THE BIBLE . . . . .	191
The Book of Nature—The Bible—Miracles.	
IX. TABLE TALK . . . . .	212
The Preacher—Life and Hope—Service—Religion—Providence—The Hereafter.	
X. AN INDIAN CHRISTIANITY . . . . .	225
Christianity and National Genius—Philosophic Pantheism—Yoga and Bhakti—The Sadhu Ideal—Money—Marriage—The Christian Sadhu and the Future.	
TABLE OF PARABLES AND ANALOGIES . . . . .	257
INDEX . . . . .	259

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*Frontispiece*—SADHU SUNDAR SINGH.

## INTRODUCTION

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

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

Sadhu Sundar Singh—"the Sadhu" as he is popularly called—lives in this twentieth century a life which, so far as external conditions are concerned, resembles that of St. Francis of Assisi. His inward experience recalls rather, in some ways, St. Paul, in others Mother Juliana, while in others it is individual to himself. If, however, we venture thus to speak of him and them together, it is not by way of asserting a comparison of great-



ness : it is merely to indicate an identity of type. Whether Sundar Singh is a great man in the sense in which History employs that term, History alone can decide. In that sense no man can be pronounced great till his career is ended, nor even then by his own contemporaries. But while we do not suggest that the Sadhu is on the same plane with St. Francis or St. Paul, we feel that, from having known him, we understand them better.

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

The manner of his teaching, even more than its substance, has a peculiar freshness for a Western hearer, with its picturesque abundance of illustration and parable, often quaint but always apt, its unstudied spontaneity, its gleams of kindly humour. It is rendered doubly effective by an arresting appearance—the impression of the turbaned head and saffron robe harmonising in some subtle way with the deep tranquillity of a countenance lighted up by loving-kindness, and

with a vivacity of expression, and occasionally of gesture, which somehow seems not to conflict with, but to express, the Peace of God within.

For the cold printed page to reproduce the atmosphere diffused by such a personality, or even to transmit to others the creative impression of his speech, is impossible. It is the more so, since we have his utterances, not in his native tongue in which he is a master of expression, but in English, a language of whose subtleties he has but small command, so that he has at times to express in the phraseology of conventional religion thoughts which to him are fresh and living. Face to face with him in private this hardly counts, hearing him on a platform it matters more, but where there is nothing but the bare written word it does materially impair the rich impression of the message and the man. Nevertheless, though the printed page cannot do full justice to the Sadhu, it can do something. The many who have seen him once, and have felt that there was much more beyond which they would gladly apprehend, will read into it the memory of his manner and his presence ; and even those to whom he is only known by hearsay may yet, we hope, find something of solid value. At any rate the attempt ought to be made to secure that the Sadhu's visit to the West should leave behind it something more definite, and

perhaps more permanent, than the personal impressions of a fortunate minority and the passing interest of the crowd.

The Sadhu's mind is an overflowing reservoir of anecdote, illustration, epigram and parable, but he never makes the slightest effort to avoid repetition ; in fact he appears to delight in it. " We do not," he says, " refuse to give bread to hungry people because we have already given bread to others." Hence we have constantly found the same material occurring in more than one of the written or printed authorities we have used. " My mouth," he says, " has no copyright " ; and many sayings that we had noted down from his own lips we afterwards discovered to be already in print. In most cases the versions differ extraordinarily little, but we have always felt free to correct or supplement one version by another at our discretion ; and, seeing that English is not the Sadhu's native tongue, we have not infrequently ventured on emendations of a purely verbal character.

It was only when we had begun to collect together scattered sayings on the same topics, that we ourselves realised the extent to which his teaching is a complete theology in picture form, making with his way of life and his mystic experience an organic whole. And if this book has any