

My First Night in Chicago

THE second of June, 1906, was a memorable day in my life. On that day I entered into a new phase of society. It was a new scene of the world's theatre. Living in an orthodox city like Benares, India, with different ideals and habits, and then plunging into the western ocean where the scientific waves are in full tide, would play a prominent part in shaping the future of my career.

It was past ten in the morning when the train reached Chicago Grand Central station. All passengers left the car; and I was the last to leave. But why? They were in a hurry to reach their homes, to look after their business, to see their sweethearts, but I—a stranger—did not know where to go.

I was the typical East Indian in this American city, who was never in a hotel in his life, not accustomed to eat at tables, not familiar with the use of fork and knife at meals, not understanding the manner and etiquette of the occidentals, and last, but not the least, a man of very little worldly experience. Indeed, it was a unique moment; the Oriental was going to embrace the Occidental, with what issue? God knows.

Fortunately, I knew the language—the language not learned by imitation or by picking up few words, but by an academic study, which helped me a great deal. So I thought it better to get some information about the localities; but where to go and enquire? I think a few words of explanation will not be out of place.

In India, the English represent the Dons of the sixteenth century. Their rule in results stands very nearly parallel to that of Spain. Naturally we, children of the soil, look at the white race as an incarnation of Death and Destruction. I, on my part, had never met a kind-faced Englishman, and in my experience always found them lacking in sympathy and courtesy.

Here, then, was the psychology of the whole matter.

To proceed with my story; I stood in the waiting room watching the people. What a contrast! Men, women and children—nice and clean—fresh and blooming, were seen all around, sitting on