

CHAPTER IV

THE MESSAGE OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE TO INDIA

Here the singer for his art
Not all in vain may plead,
The song that moves a nation's heart
Is in itself a deed.

TENNYSON:

The old Arab tribes would gather in liveliest gaudeamus, and sing, and kindle bonfires, and wreath crowns of honour, and solemnly thank the gods that in their tribe, too, a poet had shown himself. As, indeed, they well might; for what usefuller, I say not nobler and heavenlier thing, could the gods, doing their very kindest, send to any tribe or nation, in any time or circumstance.—CARLYLE.

I

THERE are men rare in any age, but unique in our age, to whom it is given to shape the mind of their country to an extent that cannot be rightly estimated in their own lifetime. Rabindranath Tagore is such a man, and the debt which modern India owes to him, we

cannot pretend to measure. His teaching is penetrating the most out-of-the way and distant corners of India; the amount of moral regeneration and social uplift which his work will accomplish, it is quite impossible to say now. To the people of India, he is a prophet with a message. In the true sense of the word he is a national poet. India fills his heart as nothing else does. He sees what India wants, and tells us what exactly it is. He sees the inward agonising of the Indian soul, understands the passions and doubts surging in her mind, wishes to deliver her from the travail through which she is passing, and give her peace of soul. He pours forth in his supreme song the dreams and aspirations which are moving the mind of India. The joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears, the doubts and beliefs of the Indian life are captured in his books. Adapting Johnson, we might say that the work of Rabindranath abounds in sentiments to which every Indian bosom returns an echo. He gives voice to the doubts which are darkening the once glorious faith of India. It is the sign that God has not lost all hope of India that Rabindranath is born

in this age. He is born at a time when there is a seething of religious beliefs and a lawless raging of social forces, the like of which has probably not been seen before. The poet of India that he is, he expresses and corrects the aspirations of the Indian community. He is the signpost warning India, which is at the parting of the ways, to pursue the path of spirit and relinquish that of matter. Deep down amidst the surging doubts, the foundations of a stronger faith in God and India's destiny are being slowly laid by the poet's work.

One of the rarest spirits that ever steered humanity, he is not without his message to the world. His message is most significant for us from the point of view of pure humanity. His writings are not narrowly national but are touched with a wider spirit. In him the voice of India speaks not only to Indians but to the world at large. To the British Empire he has a special charge, which he does not hide. The world in its present crisis appeals to him, and he has a mission to it. Dr. Sunderland, in the course of a contribution to the *Christian Register*, well

observes: "No land in the world has ever produced profounder thinkers on all the problems of religion and life than the India of the past. The India of to-day has no wiser, kinder, more broad-minded, or greater teacher than Mr. Tagore, none more eager to receive from us whatever of value we have to give, or better able to impart to us the best wisdom of his own historic land." Rabindranath interprets this ancient wisdom of India to the world, and as transfigured by his poetry and music, as revised and brought up to date by his brilliant mind and culture, it has the power to satisfy the hunger of the spirit. The world respects him not merely for his richly endowed personality and many-sided nature, which come out in his beautiful poetry, but also for the spiritual message of his writings. He points to the plague spot of modern civilisation, which hurries along the highroad to the golden fountain and seeks by conquest to gain the whole world—no matter if in so doing it loses the soul.

II

The greatest of all problems which confront the patriot-reformer of India, who proposes to shatter the sorry scheme of things entire and remould it nearer to heart's desire, is the religious future of the country. The religious situation will have to be dealt with in a manner that would guarantee the spiritual progress of the country, and do justice to the bewildering variety of faiths and creeds, indigenous and foreign, which flourish in the land. Rabin-dranath dreams of and pictures to us a vision of India, purged of its superstitions and worshipping the One God, each in its own way, without quarrel or misunderstanding. In religion he stands for a passionate devotion to God. His is not the way of intellectual comprehension, but that of intuitive grasp. While the externals of worship divide, the deeper core of religious experience is essentially the same. The Sufi mystic, the Christian divine, and the Hindu Rishi agree in regarding creation as the manifestation of the eternal beauty of God; man, His emanation and perfection, becoming one with God. The philo-

sophy of Rabindranath is an absolute idealism of the concrete type. His supreme spirit is not an abstract entity residing at a safe distance from the world, but is the concrete dynamic life at the centre of things, giving rise to the roar of the wind and the surge of the sea. It is the final truth of the cosmic dance of life and death. Rabindranath's is a wholeness of vision, which cannot tolerate absolute divisions between body and mind, matter and life, individual and society, community and nation, and empire and the world. Mystic experience the world over has this philosophy underlying it. Rabindranath's religious message is simple: Stick to religion, let religions go. Happiness is for those who realise this oneness and wholeness of spirit. It is for those who respond to the call of the divine in them.¹ To realise this goal, it is not necessary that the traditional paths should be followed; for the path of devotion is trackless.² Rabindranath gives us a pure religion, which is substantially the same in all ages and all climates, in which the purified spirit of man can find its congenial home. His religion is not hampered by any

¹ *Fruit-Gathering*, VII.

² See *Ibid.* VI., XIV., XVI.

man-made formulas, or church ordinances which act as barriers. "When religion has to make way for religious organisation it is like the river being dominated by its sand-bed; the current stagnates and its aspects become desert-like."¹ Being free and pure, it finds its spiritual kin in all faiths and creeds. All types of souls can find genuine spiritual satisfaction in it. He sees fundamental unity in diversity, and so his religion appeals to all. In the Bolpur school there are Brahmos, Christians, and Hindus. The diversity of religious beliefs presents absolutely no difficulty, as nobody deals with dogmas of sectarianism. The poet insists on the worship of the one invisible God—it does not matter by what means. He knows that God fulfils Himself in many ways. His article on "The Appeal of Christ to India"² well brings out how near to the religion of Christ his religion is. He there asks: "Who else has glorified man in every way as he has done?" It is his hope that the world-religions which have met on the soil of India will cease to conflict with one

¹ *Modern Review*, September 1917, p. 335.

² *The Quest*, April 1916.

another, and reach a reconciliation. "Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians will not fight each other on the soil of India; they will here seek and attain to a synthesis. That synthesis will not be un-Hindu, it will be peculiarly Hindu. Whatever its external features may be, the resultant harmony will be Indian in spirit."¹ Rabindranath works for the rebuilding of India, not on any narrow basis of creed, province, or language, but on the broad basis of India and her spiritual vision of universal love. Indians should work for the regeneration of India because they are all Indians, children of the same soil, descendants of the long line of Indian saints. The Hindu as well as the Muslim finds India to be the home of his noble ancestors; her earth contains the dust of his saints; she is his seat of righteousness and religion; in her progress lies his hope.

It is Rabindranath's sincere conviction that the Hindu religion can stand against the onslaught of Western civilisation, religion, and culture, on condition that it rids itself of its dogmatism and superstition. The Aryan faith,

¹ *Modern Review*, June 1913.

in its unsullied purity, can give unity to the chaotic channels pouring in floods into India from Western sources. But they will overwhelm the Indian faith, if it does not in the meantime look about itself, and with an unsparing hand cut off the weedy outgrowths. We must free ourselves from all the exhausted traditions, spent forces, and obsolete watchwords which still possess us. A spiritual religion like that of Rabindranath Tagore, which has for its ideal a right heart and a saintly character, which has for its principle love of God and service of man, can make no truce with idle rites and ceremonies, blind dogmas and superstitions, snobbery and pharisaism, orthodoxy of a priestly caste, pride and prejudice of position and authority, selfishness of classes and exclusiveness of nations. The soul of India has to be delivered from these besetting sins, and people like Rabindranath Tagore help in the process.

III

Among the evils which are poisoning the very springs of national life, the first and foremost is the caste system. Rabindranath

is not oblivious to the purposes which it served, to the value of the principles on which it was framed. When the Aryans first came to India they had to encounter the previous inhabitants of the country. As the Aryans were dominated by the spiritual impulse, they did not adopt the lazy device of either extirpating the native peoples or reducing them to slavery, but organised a social system based on the recognition of spiritual unity as well as racial differences. The caste system when instituted was a social unity in which the different peoples could live together in mutual harmony while enjoying the freedom to maintain their differences. The social organisation of India was based on the principle of reconciliation and not discord. "It is not the case in Europe that all classes do their respective, legitimate functions, and thus try by their collective efforts to maintain the social organisation; on the contrary, they are mutually antagonistic: every class is always on the alert to prevent others from growing stronger. Thus the social harmony is destroyed. . . . India has tried to reconcile things that are mutually alien to each other. . . . She set limits to and fenced off all

the rival conflicting forces of society, and thus made the social organism one, and capable of doing its complex functions.”¹ About the class of Brahmins, it is his opinion that every good society should have a section corresponding to it. In the Indian social organisation, which is a work of art, the Brahmins are at the top, and are the recognised leaders of society. Though India passed through several vicissitudes in her political fortunes, the society has not been much shaken, as her ideals and traditions were long preserved by this class. The Brahmins are the trustees of tradition and the conservers of the religious spirit. The Brahmins, according to the ideal, count poverty a privilege, consider learning their calling, and pursue the ideals of spirit with self-sacrifice and in a disinterested manner. Scorn of wealth and the pursuit of spirituality, reckless of praise or blame, are their characteristic features. Division of labour is now recognised to be a valid principle not only in economics but in other matters also, social organisation included. If we cannot make our clothes or our shoes for ourselves, if specially

¹ *Modern Review*, December 1910.

trained men can do these things much better than we can for ourselves, why should we not have a class set apart for artistic production and spiritual discovery? Members of this class are to discover and bring home to the community the joy of art and spiritual beauty. Automatically this class happens to be considered higher than the others, for while the tradesman and the merchant contribute to the physical needs, the members of this class are the purveyors of spiritual health and joy to the community. These are the leaders of society, regulating the things in which the community ought to take pleasure, exerting great moral influence on them. Those who are in the thick of the strife of the world have not the time to think of the welfare of the whole community, or to contemplate the higher things of life. But this is not to defend the present degraded and degenerated Brahmin class. These have done, besides much good, much evil in the name of God. As they have lost their old self-sacrifice and spirituality they have no claim to the respect and regard of the other classes. It is because they drilled the other classes into submission, and decreed their inferiority, that they

fell in esteem and prestige. They crippled the minds of the Sudras, and to-day the insult has come back—their minds are being crippled. “When the Sudra joined his palms in submission to the brahmanical decree of inferiority, on that very day was dug the pit for the fall of the Brahmins.”¹ They want the powers and prestige of the old Brahmin class, but they do not possess their ideals and spiritual strength which would win respect. Hence the bathos. But there is no question that the hierarchy of values incorporated in the caste system of India is right. The highest place is given to the philosopher who finds his lifework in search for truth, artistic creation, and moral endeavour. While the work of the philosopher is the recognised aim of society, the political stability and economic basis of it are also secured. Preserving peace and political order is the function of the warrior community. Classes for trading and agricultural interests are also included. It is an aristocratic organisation, where every function has a definite value assigned to it, and the scale of values depends not upon the amount of wealth, but on the

¹ *Modern Review*, September 1917, p. 337

development of the soul. Rise in the social scale is determined not by increase in wealth, but by ascent of spirit. We ought not to abandon this judgment of values. The Western civilisation, which is a civilisation of the rich, measures status by bank balances. With such a material aim and basis, selfishness and competition increase. But the Indian system has no ideas of propertied respectability. The caste system aims at universal brotherhood and love. Freedom is its basis and freedom its end. Man is looked upon as an end in himself, and not a mere creature of the moment, whom we can use for our purposes and then throw off. He is an eternal being whose purpose and destiny are to express his free spirit in actions of the world. The modern class system of the West is material in its outlook, while the caste system is spiritual. Realising that the material display of modern life conceals within it flimsiness of faith, and cannot satisfy the deeper needs of man, we have to take a lesson from the caste system, and build a spiritual civilisation on love and brotherhood, freedom and fellowship. This does not mean that we are holding a

brief for the caste system as it prevails in India at the present day. We are aware that we have come to a time when that institution requires modification. The rigid and exclusive caste system has served its purpose and must vanish. Rabindranath writes : " It has largely contributed to the freedom from narrowness and intolerance which distinguishes the Hindu religion, and has enabled races with widely different cultures and even antagonistic social and religious usages and ideals to settle down peaceably side by side. . . . But this very absence of struggle, developing into a ready acquiescence in any position assigned by the social system, has crushed individual manhood, and has accustomed us for centuries not only to submit to every form of domination, but sometimes actually to venerate the power that holds us down. . . . The regeneration of the Indian people, to my mind, directly and perhaps solely depends upon the removal of this condition."¹ The institution of caste served a purpose till not long ago, but to-day it is a positive hindrance to the spiritual faith within and progress outside. The caste system

¹ *Modern Review*, August 1910 and February 1911.

failed to recognise the flow of life, the mobility of mind, and the mutability of characteristics. It failed to realise "that in human beings differences are not like the physical barriers of mountains, fixed for ever,—they are fluid with life's flow, they are changing their courses and their shapes and volume." The soul of the caste system has departed, and what India is now worshipping with awe and veneration is a dead corpse. The vast social mechanism created by man is now crushing the soul. Independent thinking and individuality are suppressed. The individual is caught in the wheels of the machine, and the machine will have to give up its nature, for man to regain life and soul. If like the child Amal in the *Post Office* we cripple our minds and narrow our freedom by confining it to our closed prisons and taking the directions of our traditional doctors, the Shastras, we shall not recover from our illusions. As the child longs to be out, mind craves for freedom. But we have to break open the gates and pull down the walls of our closed house, for the air and light of God to pour in and enlighten us.

Rabindranath does not view the social

problems of the time from the narrow economic or utilitarian point of view. He brings his spiritual vision to bear on the social problems, and lifts them up to a higher idealist plane. His attitude to them is determined, not by the accident of birth, habit, or training, but by the spiritual vision, the one central principle to which he devotes his whole life. The present social unrest would be at an end if people adopted the right attitude to life, and developed reverence for the divine in man. The materialist view of life makes us afraid of poverty, and in nations of spiritual vision, poverty is not the cause of social discontent. India is very poor, but centuries of spiritual discipline have given the Indian peoples so much restraint and self-suppression that though the problem of poverty is most intense in India, social unrest and struggle are greater in the West. When a great famine invades the country, or death-dealing plague stalks through the land, the Indian people submit to it in meek resignation. In suffering and distress they beg and pray, mope and pine, and, at worst, weep and die in silence, handing over their souls to God. We do not hear

of strikes and riots, breaking windows and throwing bombs, mass movements and demonstrations of starving women and children. Their calm acceptance of pain and silent submission to suffering are the wonder of the world. Their patience of spirit dimly suggests the Cross of Calvary, the immortal reproach of divine virtue and wisdom against the blows of evil and circumstance. A materialist view of life is the root cause of social discontent, and the remedy for the social unrest is a spiritual one. Professor L. P. Jacks observes: "It is not the poorest nations which reveal the maximum of social discontent. It is the richest. And the prime cause does not lie in the sense of inequality between individuals who have more and individuals who have less: that no doubt is a cause, but secondary. The root evil is that a community which makes wealth its object, and pursues it on the terms laid down by the economic machine, is living under conditions which satisfy nobody and against which all men are by the higher human nature born rebels."¹ The troubles of the Western nations are due to the predominance of the

¹ *International Crisis*, p. 99.

economic motive. Nations have for their ideal economic efficiency. The greatest output is the prime consideration. Man becomes but a cogwheel in the great machine. At the altar of this machine, human victims are sacrificed. Men, women, and children, and values of spirit are given the go-by. At the present day we find that the people are highly sensitive to all this loss, but with the best will in the world they are not able to get rid of the troubles of industrialism. It is because they consider them economic problems and devise economic remedies. But so long as we are moving within the charmed circle of economics, we cannot cure these ills. In condemning them as evils, it is not our economic side that asserts itself, but our human nature. We then occupy a higher standpoint; for the economic policy requires them and so must justify them. The solution lies in the steadfast occupancy of the higher, human, or spiritual point of view. India has had this spiritual ideal, and unless she preserves it there is no chance for her. India cannot regain her former prestige and glory by merely tinkering here and there with the social system, or getting a few more seats

on the councils, or by the substitution of manufactures for cottage industries. If India becomes free in soul and preserves her spiritual individuality, then all other things shall be added unto her. "Then in India, province will join province, race will join race, knowledge will be linked with knowledge, endeavour with endeavour: then the present chapter of Indian history will end, and she will emerge in the larger history of the world."¹

Educated Indians of the present day are not quite in sympathy with Rabindranath's ideal of preserving the national identity of India, and feel that India's salvation lies in the imitation of the West. That way lies madness. In their eagerness to save their skins, they forget it will ultimately be more profitable to save their souls. If the educated classes do not realise it, it is only the sign of how far the disease has gone, and the case is so much the worse. It is impossible to believe, unless one acquainted with the inspiration of ancient India sees for oneself, the extent to which modern India has succumbed, body and soul, to the materialist influence. These Indians pride themselves that

¹ *The Future of India.*

they are practical. What a price it costs to be practical to-day! Their soul is the price they pay. There is no use in acquiring the externals and the outward forms of a political civilisation and losing the soul. Imitation, according to Rabindranath Tagore, is "like dressing our skeleton with another man's skin, giving rise to eternal feuds between the skin and the bones at every movement."¹ If the political salvation of India is to be attained at the expense of her soul, we had better preserve the soul and lose the earthly kingdom. India then will vindicate spirit. And if she is doomed to disappear, then will she die with dignity, with the colours of spirit flying. "But let us stand firm and suffer with strength for the True, for the Good, for the Eternal in man, for Thy kingdom which is in the union of hearts, for the freedom which is of the soul."² From this it should not be inferred that Rabindranath has no sympathy with things non-Indian. He is quite sure that the civilisation of the West is as much a creation of the spirit as any other civilisation. Only its soul cannot be grafted on the Indian soul. Radical reformers seem

¹ *Nationalism*, p. 54.

² *India's Prayer*.

to think that it is an easy process, as they imagine that India is some recent throw-up from the bottom of the sea, due to a caprice of the earth, with a clean waxen surface ready to receive any impression from the outside. But India is an ancient land with established traditions, honoured throughout recorded history for her spiritual civilisation, for her dignity of soul, for her intense piety, for her valour and chivalry, tolerance and hospitality, and love and peace. All these qualities have become part and parcel of the mentality of the Indian. It is not possible for him to give up what is in his blood and bone. He can only take in the outer and lose the inner. It is easier to acquire the vices of an alien civilisation than to get its virtues. As a matter of fact, contact with the West has disturbed the simple religion and life of the Indian. His intense belief in God, his sense of the strength of holiness and sacrifice, are slowly giving way to materialism and worship of money. The passion for things unseen is being replaced by the fierce eagerness to grow rich. The brows intended to look up to heaven are kissing the dust. The heart to be filled with God is set upon comfort and

display. The joy of life and creativeness is yielding to the fever of acquisition and possession. A long purse and a happy home are looked upon as the ultimate destiny of man. People of a country which never spurned poverty are growing afraid to be poor. People who knew how to die for a cause with cheerfulness and calm are growing pale by the fear of death, and loving life even at the sacrifice of their souls. Life is ceasing to be life and is becoming mere existence. It is ceasing to be human and is becoming animal. Men are living for pleasure and not for anything else. Their minds are becoming stunted down, from the shortage of intellectual material. Their souls are shrinking, from the famine of spirit. The materialist influence has been steadily growing, and eating subtly into the very substance of the Indian soul. If Rabindranath is against the political subjection of India, it is not due to any selfish motive. He is afraid of the Western spirit, which is slowly subduing the soul of India and impoverishing her life and spirit. As an instance of how much the present outlook of the Indian is shaped by the West, Rabindranath mentions the fact that the modern

Indian looks to Government for aid in everything. Though hordes of invaders deluged the country, the people of India were little affected by these, as they were administering their own affairs in many spheres. All matters connected with education and sanitation, agriculture and industry were under the control of the people. Government was only a nominal head suspended over the people, and not an organic part of it. So when Government changed hands people did not mind it. But to-day everything is to be granted by Government. Prayers and petitions, memorials and resolutions, pious protests and impotent indignations are the talk of the day. If now Government should change, chaos would prevail. The State which was only a symbol of unity has become the whole body now. This idea that everything should be done by the State is completely materialist, and we have unconsciously adopted it. Judged by the greatest test of the vitality of a nation, namely its capacity for self-sacrifice, it must be said that India is becoming denationalised and devitalised. Those who want us to go the whole length in the imitation of the West are dupes of a delusion.

Rabindranath feels that there is a great difference between the spiritual ideal for which India stands, and the material ideal with which it is in conflict. Through the acceptance of the civilisation of the East, which is religious and not secular, it is easy for us to enter the kingdom of God. Though not exclusively, still mainly, the emphasis in the East is on life and not possession, intuition and not intellect, religion and not science, freedom and not direction. It is because India represents this ideal that Rabindranath is proud to be a son of India. "I shall be born in India again and again; with all her poverty, misery, and wretchedness I love India best."¹

Blessed is my birth because I was born in the country,
blessed is my life, mother, because I have loved thee.

I do not know if thou hast wealth and riches to be a
queen. I know this much that my limbs are cooled as
soon as I stand in thy shade.

I know not in what grove blossom flowers that madden
the soul with such scents. I know not the sky where the
moon rises with such sweet smiles.

My eyes were first opened in thy light, and they will
be closed finally upon that very light.

We see that Rabindranath has no sympathy

¹ *Modern Review*, February 1917.

with those who, with a light heart, ridicule everything that is old and established and view the past of India as one unbroken period of inertia and darkness. Nor has he much in common with those who in an easy and careless mood accept with veneration everything old and established, and reject with equal vehemence the new and the untried. But when the educated Indians, carried away by the spirit of innovation, look down upon their more cautious brethren with contempt and ridicule, and view them as the enemies of progress, and when this spirit goes beyond bounds and becomes militant and aggressive, Rabindranath feels it his duty to counsel caution and calm, steadiness and self-examination. He asks them to pause for a moment and reflect on the consequences of what they propose to do. But he is not a conservative who wishes to perpetuate mischievous forms simply because they are picturesque, To him progress and reform consist in conserving the ancient ideals and building upon them. Preserving the soul of the Indian type, we may adopt whatever is good and noble in the West. Rabindranath demands a synthetic integration

of the old and the new, the East and the West. "It is idle mendicancy to discard our own and beg for the foreign," while at the same time "it is the abjectness of poverty to dwarf ourselves by rejecting the foreign."¹ Rabindranath remarks that "taking shelter in the dead is death itself, and only taking all the risk of life to the fullest extent is living"² India has preserved her vitality because, whenever she came into contact with alien civilisations, she absorbed whatever was great in them without surrendering the fundamentals of her own

¹ *My Interpretation of Indian History*. In his address on the spirit of Japan, Rabindranath says: "I am quite sure that there are men in your country, who are not in sympathy with your inherited ideals; whose object is to gain and not to grow. . . . While I agree with them so far as to say, that the spirit of the race should harmonise with the spirit of the time, I must warn them that modernising is a mere affectation of modernism, just as affectation of poetry is poetising. . . . One must bear in mind that those who have the true modern spirit need not modernise, just as those who are truly brave are not braggarts. Modernism is not in the dress of the European, or in the hideous structures where their children are interned when they take their lessons, or in the square houses with flat, straight wall surfaces pierced with parallel lines of windows where these people are caged in their lifetime; certainly modernism is not in their ladies' bonnets carrying on them loads of incongruities. These are not modern but merely Europe. True modernism is freedom of mind, not slavery of taste. It is independence of thought and action, not tutelage under European schoolmasters. It is science but not its wrong application to life." All this applies *mutatis mutandis* to the modern Indian who wants to transplant European civilisation in Indian soil.

² *Nationalism*, p. 53.

type. Whatever we adopt from others we have to adapt ourselves to our needs and to our life. India has her own self-identity, her life and soul. She can grow strong and vigorous not by the mere accumulation of Western forms and modes, but by the assimilation of them all. She should affix the stamp of her genius to whatever she lays her hands upon and accepts, otherwise her work will not be a creation, but a mere repetition. The process of assimilative synthesis has been the characteristic of India from the beginning of her history. When first the original Aryans settled at the foot of the Himalayas, the Dravidian civilisation was indented upon to a large extent. "Let none, however, imagine that non-Aryans have contributed nothing of value to Indian life. The ancient Dravidians were not indeed deficient in civilisation. Contact with them made the Hindu civilisation varied in aspect and deeper in spirit. The Dravidian was no theologian, but an expert in imagination, music, and construction. He excelled in fine art. The pure spiritual knowledge of the Aryans, mingling with the Dravidian's emotional nature and power of æsthetic

creation, formed a marvellous compound, which is neither entirely Aryan nor entirely non-Aryan, but Hindu.”¹ When later Buddhism became merged in Hinduism, it is the same process. Hinduism has synthesised all the foreign influences which invader after invader has brought to her from outside, and moulded them to its own ideals. India had always welcomed foreign influence. Hinduism has been ever old and ever new. It has been both creative and constructive. The secret of the strength of Hinduism lies in its power of assimilation. “Doubt not the nation’s capacity for self-help: know for certain that the time has come. Remember how India has ever kept alive her power of binding together. She has ever established some sort of harmony amidst all kinds of difficulties and conflicts, and hence she has survived till now. I have full faith in that India. Even now that India is slowly building up a marvellous reconciliation of the old order with the new. May each of us consciously join in that work, may we be never misled by dulness or revolt into resisting it.”² If Indian nationality is to be a live

¹ *Modern Review*, 1913.

² *Ibid.* June 1913.

spirit and not a dead imitation, then India must build up from within. Her hope lies within herself. The basis and foundation of the great India lies in the recovery of her soul and the regaining of a fresh self-confidence in her own national life. If India recovers her strength of soul and grip of spirituality, which is the secret spring of life, then no power on earth can stand against her newly acquired energy of spirit. If the soul is diseased, then it will inevitably bend in decay and death, however much we might try to prevent it by external means; but if the soul is healthy it will live down disaster, retrieve ruin, and reassert itself in spite of all external opposition. Nothing has power over it. Nothing can stand against the uprush of spirit. The soul of a nation with ideals of spirit cannot be overcome. If this faith possesses the souls of men enduringly, India will "emerge one day."

The Upanishad says: "This self is not to be gained by the weak."¹ This recovery of soul is a hard task. We may have anxious times to go through. For it, it may be, we may have to "give up our father and mother,

¹ *Nāyamātmā balahṛēnēna labhyaḥ.*

wife and children." To us, with our materialist outlook, the heights to which we may have to mount may seem giddy and dreadful. We may fall—the first climbers are certain to—but such falls are needed for the rise of India. However threatening the idea may appear, it is not impossible. For the spirit of India is not yet dead, though it may have gone to sleep. Her heart has been beating slower and slower, but it has not come to a stop. The flame of spiritual life is kept burning, though dim, all these years of stress and strain. It is this spiritual self-possession, won through ages of mysticism, that has made the Indian civilisation survive the onslaughts of the outside world. Heaven does not send such men as Rabindranath Tagore to undeserving nations. Their presence is a standing proof of the fact that the ideas for which India stands are not eclipsed, and her song not silenced. Great ideas still move her, and are the inspiration of her life and the breath of her poetry. Rabindranath has full faith in the great future of India, and with the burning faith which animates the prophet he speaks out: "Is it impossible to utilise the supreme ideas of the *Panchayagnya*

in forming a daily tie between our whole country and every member of our community? Cannot every one of us daily offer one pice or even a handful of rice in the name of our fatherland? Cannot Hinduism bind every one of us, every day of our life, with the direct bond of devotion to India, to *Bharata varsha*, the haunt of our Gods, the hermitage of our ancient Rishis, the nourishing mother of our forefathers? Cannot our relation with our benign fatherland be brought home to every one of us as a particular personal tie?"¹ Rabindranath, with the devouring flame of his patriotism, calls upon his countrymen to strive to create a devotion to the mother country, a sense of pride in its glory, and a passion for its progress.

IV

To offset the invading course of low materialist ideals, the ideals of Indian education

¹ *Modern Review*, June 1913. From this it is obvious that Rabindranath supports the idea of national solidarity. This may seem inconsistent with his criticism of nationalism in the West and his frequent reference to the East as a world of no-nations. What he means is that the East has no nations in the Western sense of the term; it has no organisations of greed and oppression, no machines which suppress all individuality. Eastern peoples are nations as each of them has a soul and a genius. India should develop national unity on the basis of its spiritual vision of freedom and humanity, love and fellowship.

should be changed. The modern educated Indian is a false copy of his Western contemporary. His voice is an echo, his life a quotation, his soul a brain, and his free spirit a slave to things. Rabindranath is so repelled by these modern products that he bursts out : "Ours is truly a God-forsaken country. Difficult indeed is it for us to keep up the strength of our will to do. We get no help in any real sense. We have none within miles of us, in converse with whom we may gain an access of vitality. No one seems to be thinking or feeling or working. Not a soul has any experience of big striving, or of real and true living. They all eat and drink, do their office work, smoke and sleep and chatter nonsensically. When they touch upon emotion they grow sentimental; when they reason they are childish. . . . One yearns for a full-blooded, sturdy, and capable personality; these are all so many shadows, flitting about out of touch with the world."¹ These products of Western education are not persons but shadows. There is neither art in their life nor music in their souls. Modern education has

¹ Letters, *Modern Review*, July 1917.

developed a slave mind. It has succeeded, we may say after Dr. Coomaraswamy, in driving art to museums and picture-galleries, knowledge into libraries and bookstalls, religion to Sundays and scriptures, and music into gramophones and concert halls. The progress of India is not so much in human souls as in bluebooks. The educated Indian is revenging himself on his educator by developing into a cheap and troublesome imitation of himself. He is like a cut flower of humanity without any roots. True education must spring from the deeper side of a man's nature. But now the educated Indian is cut off from his past, and from the immemorial traditions and affections and restraints which bind him to his kin and country. The education which is being given is not that of the whole man. The modern school is a factory "specially designed for grinding out uniform results."¹ Absolutely no account is taken of individual variations. The same method is applied to the mental needs of an infinite variety of minds. There is no freedom for the expansion of soul or the progress of liberal thought. The religious and

¹ *Personality*, p. 114.

the artistic, the moral and the spiritual sides, are drowned in the study of scientific formulas and social laws. The mechanisation of mind and the sterilisation of the intellectual seed-plot are the results of the tyranny of the educational policy. Even from the intellectual point of view the product of this policy does not command respect. We cannot say that he has any enthusiasm for knowledge, or respect for culture, or any motive for independent thought. The scheme of examinations vulgarises his mind. He does not care to know what is true, but what will fetch him marks. Not knowledge for the sake of knowledge, but knowledge for the sake of success at the examinations is the governing principle of his whole study. He has already an eye on his future life, and his ambitions interfere with his studies. He knows that in India there is a career only for mechanics and clerks, and there is not much room for talent to breathe freely. No wonder that he adjusts himself to the conditions. The modern Indian is not taught the profound interpretation of the soul of man enshrined in his great literature. The records of the inner spiritual life of the Indian race

are utterly neglected. It is obvious that nothing can so awaken powers, kindle spiritual aspiration, and set souls a quiver as a great literature which describes the highways of the human soul. There cannot be a more potent stimulus or a greater spur to the Indian mind and imagination than her ancient literature, to which the modern educated Indian is a stranger. Indian children are forgetting their past, and they are unable to understand their own nature; and they "stand as barriers choking the stream that flows from the mountain peak of their ancient history," and her future will be deprived of the water of life "that has made her culture so fertile with richness of beauty and strength."¹ The ideal which India possessed in the past should come back in its essence, though not in its entirety. Education should make for the culture of the soul, and not merely for the feeding of intellect or the cramming of memory. "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence."² "The object of education is to give man the unity of truth. Formerly, when life was simple,

¹ *The Spirit of Japan.*

² *Ibid.* p. 116.

all the different elements of man were in complete harmony. But when there came the separation of the intellect from the spiritual and the physical, the school education put entire emphasis on intellect and the physical side of man. We devote our sole attention to giving children information, not knowing that by this emphasis we are accentuating a break between the intellectual, physical, and the spiritual life.”¹ But how is the spiritual life to be cultivated? Not by means of any set lessons about God and His existence, but by allowing the souls to express themselves freely and spontaneously. For no man with a living soul in him will say what the fool saith in his heart, that there is no God. Rabindranath trusts to the instinct of the pupil and the atmosphere of the *Asram* for the kindling of the spiritual aspiration and the development of the spiritual life. “With the breath we draw we must always feel this truth, that we are living in God.”² In ancient India it was possible, because in the *asram*, which is home, school, temple, and forest rolled into one, the teachers were men who every moment

¹ *The Spirit of Japan*, p. 126.

² *Ibid.*

felt the presence of God and lived their life in Him. So their pupils felt God as they felt the green of the earth or the blue of the sky. In India the ideal of education has been to instil the vision of the eternal that so the soul might reach its fulness and freedom. Such education, which aims at the emancipation of the soul and the liberation of the human spirit from its trammels, would open the eyes of Indians to the enormous waste of life, health, and spirit, which daily takes place in the country; would reveal to them the complete circumscription of opportunity, and would give them the courage of heart and strength of mind to fight injustice in every form. In his school at Bolpur, which is not only a school of culture but an abode of piety and a school of art, Tagore combines modern methods of education with the ancient Indian ideal of soul-culture. To him the ideal school "must be an *asram* where men have gathered together for the highest end of life, in the peace of nature; where life is not merely meditative but fully awake in its activities, where boys' minds are not perpetually drilled into believing that the ideal of the self-idolatry of the nation is the

truest ideal for them to accept; where they are bidden to realise man's world as God's kingdom to whose citizenship they have to aspire; where the sunrise and sunset and the silent glory of the stars are not daily ignored; where nature's festivities of flowers and fruit have their joyous recognition from man; and where the young and the old, the teacher and the student, sit at the same table to partake of their daily food and the food of their eternal life."¹

Vernaculars should be the medium of education. It cannot be seriously contended that English should become the common language of the whole of India. Even if it is possible, it is doubtful if it is desirable. We cannot hope to develop any great literature in the English tongue. Much of the superficiality of the present-day educated classes, their lack of originality in spite of abundant assimilative genius, are due to the defects of bilingual thinking. "Our foreign learning of to-day remains a thing of the school or college, is kept hung up like a sign-board and does not become a part of our life—or remains in our note-

¹ *The Spirit of Japan*, p. 148.

books and fails to get transcribed into thought and action.”¹ Rabindranath thinks that insistence on the learning of English in the early years cuts at the root of all sound educational theory, and introduces a tedium and weariness instead of cheerfulness into the daily routine. He says: “Learning should as far as possible follow the process of eating. When the taste begins from the first bite, the stomach is awakened to its functions before it is loaded, so that its digestive pieces get full play. Nothing like this happens, however, when the Bengali boy is taught in English. The first bite bids fair to wrench loose both rows of teeth like a veritable earthquake in the mouth; and by the time he discovers that the morsel is not of the genus stone but a digestible bonbon, half his allotted span of life is over. While one is choking and spluttering over the spelling and grammar, the inside remains starved, and when at length taste is felt, the appetite has vanished. If the whole mind does not work at the beginning, its full powers remain undeveloped to the end.”² The poet wrote all his works in Bengalee and later

¹ *Modern Review*, October 1917.

² *Reminiscences*, p. 59.

translated some of them into English. English with him is only a second language, but in the schools, vernaculars are the second languages. As the vernaculars are not the medium of education, a gulf has opened up between the educated classes and the masses. English education has created an upper class of educated men divorced from the people's outlook. It has given them ideas which they cannot fulfil as they do not know how to fulfil them. The charge often urged that they do not represent the masses is not altogether without foundation. The educated men feel as if they were a class apart. Their traditional ideas are unsettled and their religious beliefs weakened. They have acquired a Eurasian mentality while the large masses are Indian still. In congresses and conferences English is the principal language. Men knowing English are treated with respect and consideration. They are proficient in appealing to Government, while they do not show as much zeal in creating among their countrymen a unity of purpose and will and feeling, which is the more important aim of political endeavour. The true way to touch the heart

of the people would be to make vernaculars the means for the spread of knowledge. This is the only way to carry the good tidings to every corner of India. If we do not preserve the sacred Sanskrit and the beautiful vernaculars of India and help them to grow by use and exercise, then the very springs of Indian higher life are destroyed.

The recovery of the religious spirit is necessary for reviving the harmony of art and industry, beauty and use. Machinery is displacing Indian industries; and while Rabindranath is not against the introduction of machinery, still the spirit in which machinery is worked and the results to which it leads call forth his condemnation. In the story of "A Resolve Accomplished," he refers to the displacement of the handloom by the machine in these terms: "A pack of evil spirits, however, advanced from over the sea, and hurled missiles of fire upon the inoffensive loom. They set the demon of hunger in the poor weavers' homes and the whistling of steam sounded like frequent blasts from their horns of victory."¹ While he believes that

¹ *Glimpses of Bengal Life*, by Rajani Ranjan Sen.

industrialism must come to India and should come, he considers that India need not pass through the evils of industrialism. He thinks that Eastern thought can be reconciled with the mechanism of Western civilisation. "In the East we have striven to disregard matter, to ignore hunger and thirst, and so to escape from their tyranny and emancipate ourselves. But that is no longer possible, at least for the whole nation. You in the West have chosen to conquer matter, and the pure task of science is to enable all men to have enough to satisfy their material wants and by subduing matter to achieve freedom for the soul. The East will have to follow the same road and call in science to its aid."¹ It will be weak sentimentalism to recoil with aversion from machinery, which has come to stay in India. What we have to guard ourselves against is the temptation to divorce art from industry. We should see to it that machinery does not make us lose faith in soul and character. If we imitate the West by banishing art from industry, religion from life, then India will have to suffer an age of industrialism, which

¹ *Lectures in America.*

would come with a heavy hand, bringing new fetters and riveting old chains. Hideous slum life, unemployment, long hours of labour, and liquor traffic would all be repeated on the soil of India. But if the Indian view is adopted, that all life, economic, intellectual, and social, should reflect the spirit of religion, then art and industry will go together and India will not suffer from an amoral artless industrialism. The ugliness and dulness, the ignorance and discontent, of the labouring populations are due to the lack of the religious spirit. In ancient India what men made they made well without being conscious of it; for then they had the joy of labour of which art is the expression. Then the creative spirit or the desire for expression was satisfied in all work. Now they have lost the joy in life. The gross vulgarity of manners and bestiality of art are the expression of a wrong state of mind. The god in man is being slowly suppressed by the beast in him. It is because the work that the labourer does is not congenial to him, because it does not exercise his mind and intelligence, that his soul is shrivelled, his life embittered, and his faculty stunted. There

is no use in criticising modern Indian art. We should criticise the conditions of life and society that have made it possible. The birds are not to blame if the heat and the dust prevent them from singing their best. No doubt the British Government is doing a great deal in the way of preserving the ancient monuments, etc., but the pity of it is they are trying to preserve the matter while undermining the mind which could create it. The fire is put out while the ashes are collected in the museums. The living faith and the national feeling are steadily losing ground. The creative imagination on which the vitality of art depends is being silenced by the disproportionate cultivation of intellect, which revels in empty formulas and barren concepts. The intellectual stimulus provided by modern education does not give it life. Its result has been to make mind material and the outlook on life grossly commercialistic. Cheapness, utility, and trade-instinct have taken the place of beauty, life, and soul-power. But if the religious Indian remembers that industry must have a soul, that the products of mills and factories should not only be useful but also

fine, that they should not only satisfy the material needs of the body but also minister to the spiritual needs of the soul, then art will take its place as a stimulus to national life, and bring beauty into it. "I must ask you to believe," says William Morris, "that every one of the things that go to make up the surroundings among which we live must be either beautiful or ugly, either elevating or degrading to us, either a torment and a burden for the maker of it to make or a pleasure and a solace to him." The simple instinct of man to surround himself with objects from which he could draw delight should be satisfied, but now we are surrounded by useful objects which offend the eyes. The end of industry should be artistic production which will be the expression of the human spirit with its freedom and flow of creativeness. Every worker should realise that he is to contribute to the spiritual welfare of the user and not merely to his bodily needs. Then shall we understand the significance of work for life. Then will labour come to be undertaken with joy, hope, and confidence, and become self-expression. Working his creative impulse, instead of being a task and a

drudgery, will become his pleasure and pastime. Organisation, instead of being the killing of the soul, will be the utterance of the inner beauty. "For the rhythm of beauty is the inner spirit whose outer body is organisation."¹

The modern Indian is forgetting the function of art in life. Art is the great emancipator from the routine of life. It lifts us from the clamorous assaults of sense and frees us from the torrent of external impressions. "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." It makes us pierce through the veil which hides the eternal within and shows it to us. The present-day art, which has the taint of materialism and which lacks dignity and repose, is a mirror of the present-day soul, which has no centre, no permanent value which it can oppose to the flux of sense. Apart from the satisfaction of animal wants, the modern Indian's life is one continuous hustle and excitement for social success and financial prosperity. He goes about seeing people, and dancing attendance on the powers that be for a title or a ribbon. There are no vacant spaces in his life, but all is one frightful motion due to ambi-

¹ *The Spirit of Japan.*

tion and avarice. Life is stifled and over-taxed. Man has time only for animal pleasures and not for divine joy. If he worships anything it is money, which he deifies. He thinks it the only thing that makes life worth living. Valuing money more than art, he lives in the world of actualities and forgets ideals. He feels a stranger in his own home. Can great art be produced in these conditions? Are haste and hustle the atmosphere for the creation of art? The poverty of India is another obstacle. We must cease to work if we would have play; cease to think of life before we can have good life. How can we retain freshness of outlook and perpetual youth when we are so worried with cares and details? Immersed in life, man has no time to think of the unseen, the root and stay of life. Man becomes a piece of clockwork, a machine with some motive-power which is soon exhausted by the work necessary for either keeping the wolf from the door or winning social recognition. A masterpiece of mechanism that man has become, how can he produce any art? It is said that India is progressing. It is admitted that we have much less of chaos

and anarchy, much less of thuggism and dacoity, much less of crimes and murders. But we cannot say that the progress has been real or, in the true sense of the word, moral. Seeley quite rightly observes: "A city without picture galleries, theatres, beautiful buildings, a city where no one writes verses or reads them or cares to talk about literary subjects, must, I imagine, be far worse than a dismal place. It need not, perhaps, be an immoral place in the common sense of the word. The average number of thefts and murders committed in it need not be greater than in other places of the same size; but in a high sense of the word I think it must be immoral; the standard will be pitched low; life will be uninteresting and virtue will become languid and, so to speak, unprogressive."¹ Such is life in India, slovenly, disgusting, and joyless. For reviving life and art a religious movement is needed. Religion is the breath of life, and art when it was great blended with religion. India saw beauty as it saw God in every thing, form, expression, and movement. If this spirit is recovered, then all life will become an art,

¹ *Lectures and Essays*, p. 171.

challenging us to develop its artistic possibilities on all sides.

v

Among the national defects which prevent India from rising to her full height are an exaggerated sense of other-worldliness and belief in fatality. We have already noted how the great souls of India, while they develop their spiritual mysticism with concentrated fervour, ignore with equal fulness the practical details of the world. They forget that only human fellowship can make God real to man. "In pleasure and in pain I stand not by the side of man and thus stand by thee."¹ In the art of life Tagore wishes us to practise the synoptic vision of the harmony of the whole and wholeness of personality, not antagonism between parts. Asceticism and mutilation of the body calumniate God, the Author of all being. Insulted nature is taking revenge on us. The retired life of contemplation and devotion should yield to one of sacrifice and devotion. We may say with Emerson that our hands must be in the world of action and our heads

¹ *Gitanjali*, 77.

above the storm. "Give us strength to love, to love fully, our life in its joys and sorrows, in its gains and losses, in its rise and fall. Let us have enough strength to see and hear thy universe and to work with full vigour therein."¹ In mediæval India, religion, to a large extent, was an opiate, a force that made men and women resigned to their sufferings. Rabindranath protests against this world-negating attitude.

No, my friends, I shall never leave hearth and home, and retire into the forest solitude, if rings no merry laughter in its echoing shade and if the end of no saffron mantle flutters in the wind; if its silence does not deepen my soft whispers.

I shall never be an ascetic.²

With Rabindranath, religion becomes the inspiration of everyday life, a force which puts power into the arm of those who fight injustice in the world. His is not the false, abstract, negative asceticism which has had a long vogue in India, but the hard austere asceticism of the saint who, brightened by the beatific vision of a better world to be won here on earth not by renunciation but by pain, struggle, and achievement, works for the welfare of humanity.

¹ *Sādhanā*, p. 133.

² *Gardener*, p. 78.

Belief in karma, interpreted as fatality, has deprived the Indian of spirit and spontaneity, initiative and endeavour. But karma is only a name for man's own past, and man as spirit has control over it.

Who drives me forward like fate?
The myself striding on my back.¹

The drive of doom is only the influence of man's own past. Man is mightier than his karma. While his body and possessions are subject to the law of karma or necessity, the mind of man is free. Man is in bondage so long as he is at the mercy of vain hopes and fears, when he considers himself to have interests and possibilities of his own apart from the whole of which he is a part. He is free when he knows his place in the universe and realises it in his life. His freedom rises or falls according as he is more or less selfless. The spark of divinity in man is the sign of his freedom, and fatality, in the words of Romain Rolland, is the "excuse of souls without a will." Rabindranath writes: "Asks the Possible to the Impossible, 'Where is your dwelling-place?'" 'In the dreams of the impotent,'

¹ *Stray Birds.*

comes the answer." ¹ Man is the captain of his soul, and it is foolish to give up attempts in the belief that all is due to karma.

The song of Rabindranath is a call to national consciousness and an inspiration to national devotion. He asks us to employ to greater purpose the most precious energies of the Indian soul. Of all the energies of the world, the greatest are those which reside within a people's heart and character. He calls upon Indians to pour out their energies into the country's cause without surrendering themselves to the temptations of false asceticism and fatality.

VI

This sketch would be incomplete without an account of Rabindranath's views about the political condition of India. With all the advantages of good government India cannot be said to be free. For freedom means not estrangement from life or killing of faculty, but the enlargement of self, the expansion of personality, and the utmost possible extension of faculty and desire. This we can have only

¹ *Stray Birds*, 129.

if we have the right of self-government, for "the right of being one's own master is the greatest of man's rights."¹ But India which is deprived "of the discipline of self-government and means of self-defence" is not free.² For the present condition of India, she is as much responsible as Britain. There is such a thing as the logic of history. The world is not in the hands of blind inconsequence. If nations suffer, it is not without reason. The fall of India is due to the narrow outlook of the average Indian. The clash of castes and creeds, the atmosphere of hate and prejudice, the indifference to the disinherited of the earth, the waste of the spiritual wealth of the country, the waging of war on the ancient dead of India, have all contributed to the fall of India. The people gave up their rich and spiritual heritage and became intensely selfish, and the present distress is the outcome. India shall not win freedom unless and until she casts off her materialism and selfishness. "So long as we, out of personal and collective ignorance, cannot treat our countrymen properly like men,

¹ "Thou shalt obey," *Modern Review*, September 1917.

² *Sādhanā*, p. 109.

so long as our landlords regard their tenants as a mere part of their property, so long as the strong in our country will consider it the eternal law to trample on the weak, the higher castes despise the lower as worse than beasts, even so long we cannot claim gentlemanly treatment from the English as a matter of right, even so long we shall fail to truly waken the English character, even so long will India continue to be defrauded of her due and humiliated."¹ The greatest enemies of nations are not their foreign foes, but the forces that dwell within their borders. From these nations have to be saved. The real obstacles to Indian progress lie in regions where the British Government has no sway. The blind superstitions, the deification of customs, the ancient institutions which make for discord, are responsible for the present degenerate condition of India. To the question, Why is India only a dependency and not a partner? why is she merely in the group without being of it? why is she a veritable pariah among the nations of the British Empire? Tagore's answer would be, Why are

¹ *The Future of India.*

the forty million untouchables kept down by the people of India? why are they in Hinduism but still not of it? why are they considered pariahs among the peoples of India? India is only reaping the fruits of her past karma. As India treats her lower classes, so will conquering nations treat India. Till caste prejudice and religious pride disappear from India, she will have no right to complain of the race-hatred and race-prejudice of the outside world. We cannot ask for absolute political freedom so long as we welcome cruel tyranny in social life. We cannot break life into fractions. We cannot say we shall be free in religion, fight for freedom in politics, but be enslaved in social life. Ages of suffering are the means by which God helps nations to recover their souls. Though the stars are always in the heavens, yet man sees them only at night. The misfortune that has overtaken India will help her to look up to the stars of eternity, which shine as brightly in the heaven above as in the heart below. The hard school of misfortune is needed to tear India from the false idols of commerce, luxury, and pleasure, and bring her back to God. Suffering is the penalty which

India has to pay for the corruption of centuries. Through it the soul of India is being glorified and her spirit regenerated. Under the spur of sorrow, suffering, and subjection nations like individuals rise to their spiritual heights. God is chastising the people of India and calling them to repentance. Contact with the West has made India become conscious of her weakness and unworthiness. Like St. Peter of old, India now hears the cock crow and weeps saying, "Lord, I have denied thee!" She is reawakening, is learning the causes of her decadence and coming to believe in the truth of her ancient ideals and inspiration.

"To-day India is on every side defrauding and humiliating herself in scripture, religion, and society; she is not awakening her own soul by means of truth and sacrifice, therefore she is not getting from others what she otherwise might have had. Therefore the union with the West is not becoming complete in India; that union is not bearing full fruit, but only giving us shame and pain."¹ Rabin-dranath is not a cynic to laugh at the condition of India. He is dreadfully earnest, and has

¹ *The Future of India.*

neither the time nor the mood for cynicism. The undertone of sorrow in his writings is due to the consciousness that India is not doing her share. The present condition of India makes his heart sick. "Our endeavours after political agitation seemed to me unreal to the core and pitifully feeble in their utter helplessness. I felt that it is a blessing of Providence that begging should be an unprofitable profession, and that only to him who hath shall be given. I said to myself that we must seek for our own inheritance and with it buy our true place in the world." What is that inheritance? "The ideals of simplicity of life, clarity of spiritual vision, purity of heart, harmony with the universe, and consciousness of the infinite personality in all creation."¹ He knows what conditions are to be reckoned with, what factors are operating to thwart the bright burning of the flame of spirit. India with the colossal poverty, illiteracy, and ignorance of the masses, the rising materialism and the waning idealism of the classes, the gradual impoverishment of spirit, the petty dissensions and quarrels, the low level of

¹ *Shantiniketan*, Introduction, pp. 2, 3.

sanitation and education, which make themselves felt when a famine or an epidemic visits the country, is a sight which will make the most cheerful temper surrender itself to gloom. The seeming pessimism of Rabindranath's writings is due to his realisation of the forces working against the spiritual revival. He has no doubt about the great future of India when she realises the promise of her past, but he is sorry that it has not come yet. The vein of sadness is due to this disappointment. Rabindranath has visions of the future inspired by the story of the past, but the present does not seem to contain the promise of the coming era. There is the indifference to the things of spirit; the silence in the temple of God. There is the altar yet standing but broken and profaned. India once the home of spirit is now flooded with materialism, once glorious and brilliant in power and life is now lost in inertia and egotism. We may go round and round, but we shall not catch any generous sympathy or pure enthusiasm or earnest spiritual aspiration. Prosaic calculation and selfishness have invaded all things and made mankind isolated, degraded and deformed. Looking

at the desert of the world around with its spiritual solitude, his heart sinks with the burning weight on it. Rabindranath, who is of imagination all compact, feels that a religious revival will lift India from her present decadence. It alone can bring new life where life is becoming extinct, and new hope where hope is being abandoned. As he brings us the glad tidings of deliverance, his message is one of joy and hope, courage and optimism.

VII

Rabindranath is glad that India has come temporarily under the sway of Britain, for the impulse to national life and regeneration first came through this contact. A general questioning in all matters, social, moral, and religious, has arisen. People are asking what it is that is wrong with the Indian civilisation which it has been obtaining that has made it a failure in certain respects. What is it that has betrayed India into its present condition of economic poverty and political subjection? Contact with the West has resulted in unrest in all matters, and has afforded an opportunity for the recasting of

some of the old formulas of the Indian civilisation. Rabindranath recognises the good work done by Britain in India. He is sure that if India should be subject to any foreign domination, it were better British than any other. Britain has created an efficient though costly administration, an effective reign of law which has given security to life and property, and thus laid the foundations of national progress and unity. To Britain, India owes her political ideal of freedom. When Britain stepped into India, she consciously or unconsciously set in motion forces which will not cease to operate until freedom becomes an accomplished fact. "Recently the British have come from the West and occupied a chief place in Indian history. This event is not uncalled for or accidental. India would have been shorn of its fulness if it had missed contact with the West. The lamp of Europe is still burning; we must kindle our old extinguished lamp at that flame and start again on the road of time. We must fulfil the purpose of our connection with the English. This is our task to-day in the building up of great India." The contact with Britain has led to the liberation of spirit

and emancipation of man. This great task is to be carried out to its logical conclusion. There is no use in liberating spirit only to kill it. Spiritual liberation is the basic principle of political freedom, and one means the other. England has to an extent contributed to the first, but has yet to grant the second. She has created ideals of citizenship, patriotism, and political freedom which she is bound to fulfil. There is no use in complaining, in the opinion of Rabindranath, that responsible government by the Indians cannot replace good government by the British, as the peoples are politically backward and would make mistakes. The spirit of European civilisation has taught us to reply to this charge thus: "The making of mistakes is not such a great disaster as the deprivation of the right of being one's own master. We can only arrive at truth if we are left free to err. We have yet more to say; we can remind our rulers that though they may now be proudly driving the automobile of democracy, the creaking of the old parliamentary cart, when it first started on its journey in the night, as it jerked its way from the rut of one precedent to another, did not sound exactly

like the music of a triumphal progress. It had not always the benefit of a steam-roller-smoothed road. How it used to sway from this interest to that, now of the king, now of the church, now of the landlord, now of the brewer, through faction, corruption, brawling and ineptitude! Was there not even the time when the attendance of its members had to be secured under threat of penalty? And talking of mistakes, what a dismal tale could be unfolded of the mistakes the mother of parliaments has made, beginning from the time of its old relations with Ireland and America down to its recent action in the Dardanelles and Mesopotamia—to say nothing of the not inconsiderable list which might be compiled for India alone. . . . Self-government not only leads to efficiency and a sense of responsibility, but it makes for an uplift of the human spirit. It is only when those who are confined within the parochial limits of village or community—are given the opportunity of thinking and acting imperially that they will be able to realise humanity in its larger sense. For want of this opportunity every person in this country remains a lesser man; . . . so in spite of all

the risk of error or mischance we must have self-government." This and this alone is the sovereign cure of all the national distempers of India. "The Englishman may point to his history and tell us: 'This great price of self-government have I earned only after many a struggle and with infinite toil and trouble.' I admit it. Each pioneer race has arrived at some particular truth through much sorrow, error, and sacrifice. But those who follow after have not to tread the same long path of tribulation. What it took ages of shower and sunshine for Europe to mature, Japan was able to transplant in no time, roots and all, to her own soil. . . . So if in our character the qualities necessary for successful self-government appear to be in defect, it is all the more reason that practice in that art should be the sooner commenced. . . . Had it been true that men must first deserve and then desire, then no people in the world would ever have attained freedom. The West boasts of democracy to-day. I have no wish to stir up the repulsive mire which is still so plentiful beneath the surface glamour of the Western peoples. Had there been some paramount power to rule, that, while such a state

of things prevail, no democracy is to step into its rights, then not only would all the foulness have remained where it is, but all hope of its ever being cleansed away would vanish. So in our social life and our individual outlook there are no doubt blemishes. But still we must be our own masters. The great festival of man is in progress, but in no country are all its lamps ablaze—nevertheless the festivity proceeds apace. If our lamp has gone out for some little while, what harm if we light its wick at Britain's flame? While it would not diminish Britain's lustre, it would add to the world's illumination."¹ It is Rabindranath's feeling that India would progress far faster if the people were granted self-government. There is the example of Japan, and there is nothing to prevent India from progressing in the same way. If the representatives of Britain in India do not welcome the signs of growth and change in men's ideas but rather try to suppress them with a high hand, even that is necessary, Rabindranath thinks, for the advancement of India, for he says :

¹ "Thou shalt obey," *Modern Review*, September 1917.

The more they tighten their bands, the more will our bands snap ; the more their eyes redden, the more will our eyes open.

Now it is time for you to work and not to dream sweet dreams, and the more they roar, the quicker and better will our sleepiness be cured.

Persecutions do not crush convictions and faith but help to foster them. The repressive measures create a feeling of suspicion and distrust in the rulers. The feeling of concord between the two peoples is broken down instead of being allowed to grow into a reasonable harmony. The result is a growing bitterness and a sense of injustice. Rabindranath says : "Extremism is woefully wrong as a policy of Government. The high road of law may sometimes prove a roundabout way of reaching the goal, but, like riding rough-shod over Belgium's rights, the extremism of shortening the legitimate road is never seemly."¹

Rabindranath firmly believes that Britain will grant to India self-government. She knows, and the European War is reminding her of it, that if empire becomes the dominion of the subject races it cannot last long ; if it means the commonwealth of the free then

¹ *Modern Review*, December 1917.

it has a chance. Britain is fighting for this latter conception against the Central Powers which stand for world dominion or downfall. Universal dominion is an idle dream. Empire must have a moral basis. It is a spiritual entity. The mission of Britain is to work the greatest experiment of the world, namely, establish a commonwealth of free nations, belonging to different races, creeds, and religions. It is this spiritual purpose that binds the different peoples of the Empire to-day in fighting the opposite principle. Power is not the one thing great about the British regime. There are historic ideals for which Britain stands, and the British rule in India should not give the lie to those ideals. It will be an insult to the free peoples of the British commonwealth to tell them that they are in India to hold Indian peoples subject. The revolution in Russia has proved that a Government, however strong and powerful it may be, cannot defy and ignore the general will of the nation. What has been proved to be a dead superstition in Europe cannot be a live reality in Asia, though ideas take a long time to travel from Europe to Asia. The inevitable

will come, and it shall be the proud privilege of Britain to guide India to her destiny. What India wants at the present moment is not carping criticism or commercial exploitation, but intelligent sympathy and practical guidance. If Britain gives this, she will be repaid a thousandfold materially and spiritually ; if she does not, it will be a betrayal of her trust, a crime against civilisation and a sin against humanity. It will be a disaster if the British connection with India breaks up, for that would be the admission of defeat of reason on both sides. Such a catastrophe only means the failure of reason and the collapse of understanding between the two nations. But so long as there is statesmanship on either side, it will be averted. Rabindranath hopes that the union between England and India will be a permanent one. In connection with nationalism in the West, he observes : " Our only intimate experience of the nation is the British nation, and so far as government by the Nation goes, there are reasons to believe that it is one of the best. Then, again, we have to consider that the West is necessary to the East. We are complementary to each other, because of

our different outlooks upon life, which have given us different aspects of truth. Therefore if it be true that the spirit of the West has come upon our field in the guise of a storm, it is, all the same, scattering living seeds that are immortal. And when in India we shall be able to assimilate in our life what is permanent in the Western civilisation, we shall be in the position to bring about a reconciliation of those two great worlds. Then will come to an end the one-sided dominance which is galling. What is more, we have to recognise that the history of India does not belong to one particular race, but it is the history of a process of creation to which various races of the world contributed—the Dravidians and the Aryans, the ancient Greeks and the Persians, the Muhammadans of the West and those of Central Asia. Now that at last has come the turn of the English to bring to it the tribute of their life, we neither have the right nor the power to exclude them from their work of building the destiny of India.”¹ Rabindranath feels it his duty to promote this union in every way, and he is up against either

¹ *Modern Review*, June 1917.

party, Britain or India, who behaves in a manner unworthy of the great purpose for fulfilling which they are brought together. Loyalty to the ideals of the British Empire requires that we should remind our rulers of their duty when they fail to see it. His silent and emphatic though dignified protest against the ill-treatment accorded to Indians in Canada, by refusing to set foot on Canadian soil, shows how deep his convictions about the self-respect of Indians are. He does not want them to eat dirt, or pocket insults lying down, or lick the hand that strikes.

Let us know that Thy light grows dim in the heart that bears
its insult of bondage,
That the life, when it becomes feeble, timidly yields Thy
throne to untruth ;
For weakness is the traitor who betrays our soul.¹

VIII

Before we conclude the chapter, we shall consider Rabindranath's views about the ways and means to be adopted for the regeneration of the country. This question is important, as gross misconceptions prevail on the point. It

¹ *India's Prayer.*

is said that Rabindranath's song has been the inspiration to anarchist activities, and is not altogether out of sympathy with the "flirtations with China, Japan and America" of which we sometimes hear from the foreign papers. Strange to say, the opposite view prevails in some quarters in India, where it is urged that Rabindranath has given up his old nationalist attitude. Let us make his position clear.

Rabindranath has no sympathy with the moderates of the Congress party whose political faith is symbolised by the mid-Victorian catchwords of Rationalism and Enlightenment, Progress and Liberty, and whose method is that of peaceful constitutional agitation through the press and the platform. Their attitude to the ancient spirit of India is one of indifference, if not contempt. They talk glibly of Mill and Morley, Burke and Bright, and would be pleased if the rest of India followed them in imitating the Western forms without taste or talent. As their programme is without any spiritual foundation, it does not catch. Rabindranath thinks that the moderates have developed mendicancy in politics into a fine art. The

followers of this "begging method" do not have any clear ideas about the future of the country, do not know what paths lead to success, and even if they know, have not the courage to pursue them. The extremists are not the bomb-throwers and the train-wreckers but the advocates of independence of action. While the moderates feel that by talk, persuasion, and such other cheap and easy methods, the political aim can be attained, the extremists are of opinion that without risk and suffering nothing great can be realised. These have a sincere desire to face the issues and think out the problems, and shrink from consoling themselves with comfortable illusions. It is their contention that political problems cannot be solved by a philosophy of phrases. While the moderates try to persuade the rulers by argument, the extremists feel that earnest spiritual work would convince the rulers of the justice of their cause. These turn from shams to realities, and appeal to men of fire and character and demand from them sacrifice of life and home, property and possession for the sake of the country. They also adopt constitutional agitation, but in a bold and

strong-nerved manner. But even this school errs, as it forgets that the problem of India is not merely a political one but a problem of life on all its sides. "They did not recognise the patent fact that there were causes in our social organisation which made the Indian incapable of coping with the alien."¹ He asks: "What should we do if, for any reason, England was driven away? We should simply be victims for other nations. The thing we in India have to think of is this—to remove those social customs and ideals which have generated a want of self-respect and a complete dependence on those above us—a state of affairs which has been brought about entirely by the domination in India of the caste system and the blind and lazy habit of relying upon the authority of traditions that are incongruous anachronisms in the present age."² To Rabindranath the caste system of India is as mischievous in its effects as the nation of the West. Both are mechanical organisations dead and wooden, inelastic and soulless. His desire is that all servants of India should be dominated by the

¹ *Nationalism*, p. 113.

² *Ibid.*

constructive ideal of spiritual freedom, and with this in view should try to rescue the people from despotism, civic, social, and political.

In a country aspiring for a new life, where there is a general yearning for a brighter world and a purer sky, the passions of men assume different forms. While there are people fearful of violent conduct, there are others who gladly court it. Some of those who belong to the latter category are the unfortunate and misguided youths who resort to political crime, in their blind passion to burst asunder the chains that bind the nation. A pessimistic view of the situation breeds in them distrust in right and justice; and cheap compromises of adventure and mistaken notions of cross roads to success commend themselves. Lover of straight conduct that Rabindranath is, he passionately pleads against this school of thought. "I have consistently urged this one thing, that the wages of wrongdoing are never found to be worth while in the long run, for the debt of sin always ends by becoming the heavier. I emphatically assert that the extremism which is neither decent, nor legal, nor open, which

means forsaking the straight road and taking to tortuous paths in the hope of sooner gaining a particular end, is always utterly reprehensible." He impresses on the people of India with all the force at his command that there is no short cut to political freedom through sin and crime, but only a royal road through strength and suffering. A straight line is the shortest which can be drawn between two given points not only in space and geometry but also in spirit and life. Curved lines may for a time seem to be shorter, but ultimately they would reveal their own inordinate length. For a time we may think ourselves victorious in creating victims, but victories and victims do not lead to triumph. We may achieve our aim, but it will not last long. Virtue which means sacrifice is the only path to salvation. Stern worship of morality in scorn of all expedients is the only way to life. In the nature of things there is no compromise between good and evil, right and wrong, truth and falsehood. We cannot temper the one with the other. All our actions are under the inexorable dominion of logic. There is such a thing

as karma, which we cannot violate with impunity. Every crime will be followed by its expiation. Every violation of rights carries along with it inevitable consequences of strife and suffering which none may prevent; every offence committed generates an amount of immorality which undermines the energy and virtue of the national heart. The moral law holds that when we strike others, that blow comes back to ourselves. Corruption leads to death and not to a new life. Many a resplendent youth, good and devoted to the cause of truth, will by the adoption of violent anarchism grow weak and brutal, for sooner or later the moral crisis comes, when the light that inspires courage and confidence, that strengthens the soul to service and sacrifice, is put out for ever. The vision is darkened by doubt and distrust, the soul poisoned and therefore deadened, and the sacred cause weakened, if not shattered. The high mission confided by God to the care of India cannot be accomplished through walking in crooked ways and adopting false doctrines of expediency, but can be fulfilled only through the worship of eternal truth and

the practice of austere virtue, by the sweat of the soul and the sacrifice of the body. Let us not desire to worship falsehood. Let us not seek to sully the whiteness of our souls by acquiring faith in political machiavellism or Jesuitical opportunism. Let us not introduce the gnawing worm of immorality into the soul of our sacred cause. Let us believe that defeat is nobler than dishonour, suffering than infliction of suffering, sorrow than hatred. Let us learn to suffer without hate and sacrifice without despair. Let not the soul be bent to any other authority than that of righteousness which is everlasting, like the mountains. Rabindranath abhors all forms of terrorism and summons his countrymen to work for the regeneration of India, strong in the possession of a pure and stainless conscience. It is his earnest wish that the new patriotic impulse which is a powerful element in the life of young India should be kept pure and clean from being mixed up with any taint of crime or unworthy affection.

While Rabindranath protests against the rage for destruction which has captured a few stray youths in the country, he points out

that the tendency is due to the influence of the West. India's religion has always stood for the right. Unrighteous methods may yield us temporary success, but ultimate ruin is inevitable. The Indian Scriptures declare "Men flourish by unrighteousness. In unrighteousness appears their welfare, by unrighteousness they overthrow their enemies, but they are destroyed at the root." The history of the "progressive" nations of the world teaches the Indian youth that all is fair in love and war and diplomacy. He learns that the honour of nations stands rooted in dishonour. He finds that the stern facts of history are contempt for moral law, disregard of human life and indifference to the rights of weak nations. Calculations of diplomacy seem to inspire the practical morality of rising nations which, time and again, have bought and sold, neglected and despised, betrayed and subjugated the weak peoples of the earth. He sees that even in free countries there are miserable squabbles of parties and factions, struggles of states and individuals desirous of power. If with all these they are successful, he infers that

success is the result of unscrupulousness. History seems to him to be a register of crimes and misdeeds, and he asks, Why should we not make history in the way it is made? If politically free countries open men's letters,—“a practice near of kin to picking men's pockets” (Carlyle),—break seals, violate secrets and trample on the holy privacy of personality, and if no just retribution has overtaken them, he is inclined to throw overboard the teachings of his scriptures and doubt the very existence of the moral law. Rabindranath says: “We are ashamed of the methods by which some of our youths have attempted to get rid of the obstacles to their country's progress. We are all the more ashamed of it because the idea of the divorce of expediency from Right was taught us by the West. The open and secret lies of diplomacy, the open and secret robberies sanctioned by State craft, are looked upon in the West as the inevitable alloy in the gold which serves to strengthen the metal. Thus have we come to learn that it is foolish and feeble—mere silly sentimentalism—to allow Righteousness to bother

and worry where patriotic self-interest shows the way.”¹ In this way, the Indian ideals of the inviolability of right, the sanctity of soul and respect for property, have met with defeat, in the struggle with the Western, in the minds of our young. It is high time for nations to repudiate the immoral distinction between private and public morality, and declare with Burke that the principles of true politics are those of morality enlarged. Rabindranath protests against the breaking of life into distinct compartments with separate ideals. We cannot say that family life is one thing, commercial business another, and international politics a third. It may be that the civilisation of Europe practises this compartmental division, but India should withstand the temptation to pay Europe back in her own coin. We should not “imitate Europe in one of her worst features which comes out in her behaviour to people whom she describes as yellow or red, brown or black,”² and thus lose faith in God and man, truth and moral law. It is incorrect to think that the West has gained her present eminence by

¹ *Nationalism*, p. 87.

² *Ibid.*

the adoption of unscrupulousness. There is a living soul in the Western civilisation which rebels against that deep distrust in man, that cynical contempt for his sacred rights which find expression in the policies of Governments which do not hesitate to break faith and violate rights to gain their selfish ends. The greatness of Europe is due not so much to her perfection of power as to her reverence for unselfish ideals.¹

It is necessary for a good Government to devise ways and means by which the enthusiasm, energy and power of sacrifice of the nation can be wisely directed. For enthusiasm unregulated by reason, and rooted in despair touches the confines of madness, a result undesirable in the interests of the rulers as well as of the ruled. The devotion to what they consider the right, the power of complete self-surrender and fearless acceptance of death and danger of these extremists can be turned into valuable assets of the country. And it is the duty of a Government interested in putting down political crime to open out paths by which whatever is noble

¹ See *Nationalism*, p. 89.

can be turned to good account. For it is when there are no open avenues to the service of the country that secret and tortuous paths are pursued and hidden and unknown Gods worshipped. Life is movement, and we cannot deny movement. If we stop it in its usual course it seeks other outlets, and in so doing bursts and explodes. The soul is meant for freedom and joy of creation. All the powers in the world cannot arrest the restless search for freedom, the cry of life or the hurrah for existence. "It is not enough to keep open only the avenues to clerical employment in any comprehensive scheme of Imperial Government,—if no road be left for adventurous daring the soul of man will pine for deliverance, and secret passages still be sought, of which the pathways are tortuous and the end unthinkable."¹

¹ *Reminiscences*, p. 143.