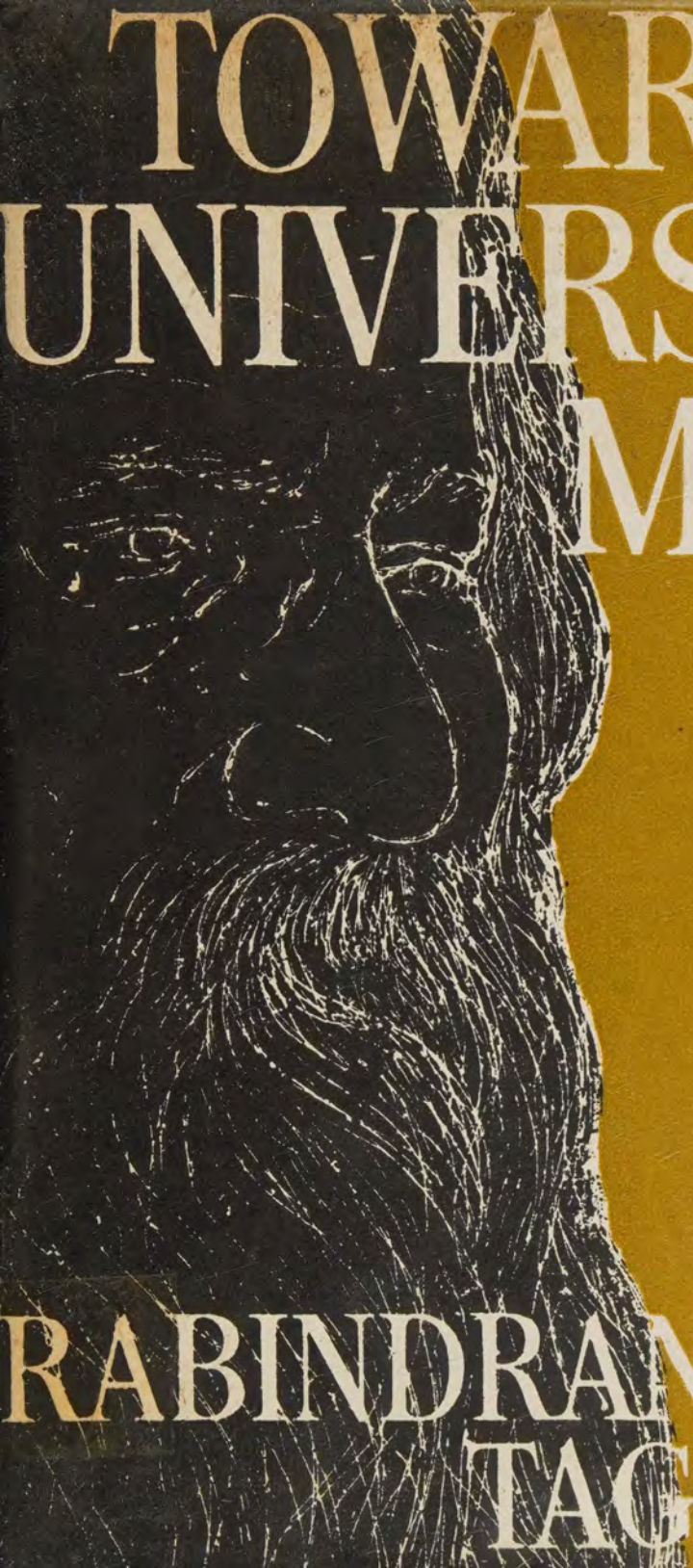
TOWARDS UNIVERSAL MAN



RABINDRANATH TAGORE

RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S contributions to religious and educational thought, to politics and social reform, to moral regeneration and economic thought are as great as his contribution to world literature. His conception of the aim of education as the development of an integrated personality, his emphasis on the role of the individual in social and political reform, his synoptic view of religion, his internationalism—they are consistent with the fundamental tenet of his philosophy, the unity of life. One can find all through his writings a deep awareness of the great diversity of life and thought and of the need to conserve all elements of value in a harmonious synthesis. The eighteen essays in this volume are a representative collection of his extra-literary writings. They contain a message for humanity; time has not altered its validity.

The preparation of *Towards Universal Man* has been a fine example of international co-operation. Thirty essays of Tagore, selected by a hundred distinguished students of the poet, were translated into English by a group of people chosen by a committee headed by Prof. Humayun Kabir, India's Minister for Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs. These translations were then circulated among eminent scholars in India, Britain and America, the final selection for the volume being made on the preferences shown by these readers. Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya, a well-known writer, is the Chief Translator and Editor of this Tagore Birth Centenary Commemorative Volume.

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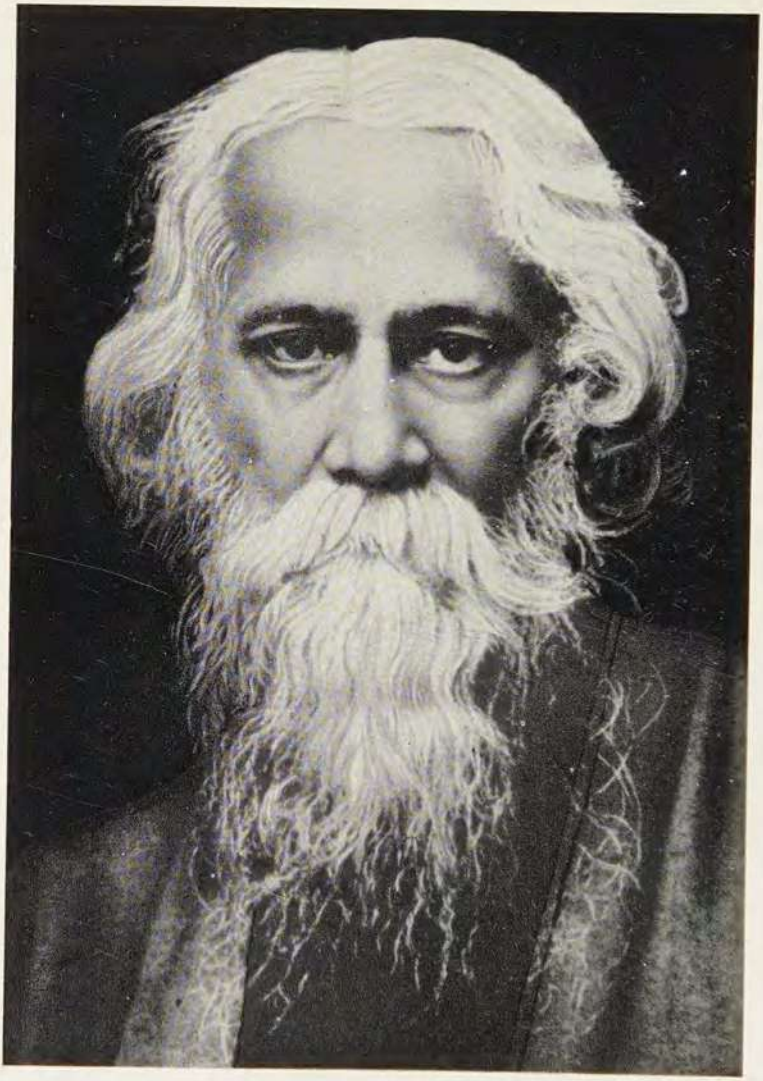

TOWARDS UNIVERSAL MAN

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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1961

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TAGORE

This Volume is being published simultaneously in India, the United Kingdom and the United States of America by Asia Publishing House on behalf of the Tagore Commemorative Volume Society, New Delhi, in collaboration with the Ford Foundation, New York, on the occasion of the Centenary of the birth of the poet on 7 May 1961.

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Foreword

Two years ago, when plans were being discussed for the world-wide commemoration of Rabindranath Tagore's hundredth birthday anniversary, the Ford Foundation in India talked with Prime Minister Nehru and Dr Radhakrishnan, India's Vice-President, on what contribution it could most appropriately make.

Most in keeping with the Foundation's work in India, we felt, was to arrange for the collection and preparation of a commemorative volume of Tagore's writings on contemporary social problems, a field in which this celebrated patriot-poet played a pioneer part and contributed to India and the world new lines of social thought. His many important writings in this field had never been brought together ; many were not available in translation.

It seemed important that the best of these works should be assembled and made available to those who today are helping plan and carry out India's many programs of social and economic development, and to the many others in India and elsewhere who, though knowing Tagore as a poet, are less familiar with his role as one of India's greatest social pioneers.

The Foundation was fortunate to be able to put the responsibility for preparing this commemorative volume in the hands of a specially constituted Tagore Society, under the leadership of Professor Humayun Kabir, the distingu-

ished Bengal scholar now India's Minister for Culture and Scientific Research. The Society worked with a grant from the Foundation to select, translate and prepare the material for publication. All credit for the quality of this volume goes to the Society and its distinguished body of translators as well as the eminent men and women in India and the U.S. and the U.K. whom the Society asked to help in the final selection.

It is expected that should this volume reach as many readers East and West as it is hoped, any royalties accruing to the Society can be put to further study of Tagore as one of the first great leaders of the new India now unfolding.

To this new India, Tagore has much to say. The problems to which he addressed himself—education, caste, rural reconstruction, self-reliance and self-respect, the role of tradition, the fruitful blending of the cultures and thought of East and West, the status of women, civic consciousness and self-government—these are problems with which India struggles today and for which it must find effective answers. In finding them, India should be able to draw to the full upon the guidance, the insight, the wisdom of all its great men, among whom this Bengali teacher and reformer will always be numbered.

DOUGLAS ENSMENGER

Preface

RABINDRANATH TAGORE has been universally recognized as one of the greatest lyric poets of all times. His standing as a short story writer, novelist, dramatist and musician is also unquestioned. He took to painting late in life and yet achieved distinction in this new form of art. In a word, his achievements as an artist in the most comprehensive sense of the term are almost without parallel in history.

It is however not so well known that Tagore made major contributions in the fields of education, economics, politics and social affairs—contributions that are significant not only for India but the whole world. The massiveness of his intellect and his influence on the Indian Renaissance have not yet been fully appreciated outside Bengal as most of his writings on these subjects are in Bengali and have either been translated inadequately or not translated at all. If Tagore has not been fully recognized in India, it is not surprising that men of the western world are not aware of his insight into Indian life and the way in which he initiated many of the creative movements of modern India.

The year 1961 will mark the Centenary of Tagore's birth. I have long felt that perhaps the best memorial on the occasion would be to bring out in an English translation a selection of Tagore's essays on social, economic, political, educational and religious topics. The Ford Foundation was planning to make its contribution to the Centenary by

promoting better understanding between India and the West and readily accepted my suggestion for the publication in India, Britain and U.S.A. on 7th May, 1961, of a volume containing the best of Tagore's thought on society, education, politics, economics and religion. A generous donation of $13,000 by the Foundation enabled us to set up a registered Society with composition as shown in Appendix I to carry out this project.

On behalf of the Tagore Commemorative Volume Society, we approached about a hundred well-known students of Tagore who had read his work in the original and asked them to select thirty essays which in their opinion represented the best in Tagore's thought. About forty of them responded to our invitation and it was perhaps not surprising that a large number of suggestions were common. The Society selected thirty essays on the basis of their suggestions and arranged for their translation afresh into English. The list of these essays will be found in Appendix II. The Society also appointed Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya, one of the best-known Indian writers in English, as the Editor-cum-Chief Translator of the Volume. The names of those who helped us in making this first selection as well as of the translators will be found in Appendices III and IV.

We then approached a number of leading scholars in Europe and America to make a selection of about fifteen to twenty essays out of these thirty as the ones which are likely to make the deepest and most permanent impact on Western readers. I am happy to say that in spite of their heavy preoccupations, almost everyone I approached undertook the onerous task of reading some six hundred pages of typescript and sent me their suggestions well within the time limit I had imposed. They also did me the courtesy of

reading my draft Introduction and making valuable suggestions many of which I have incorporated in the present text. After taking into consideration their views, the Society has finally selected eighteen essays which constitute the text of the present volume. Our collaborators overseas and from India outside Bengal, whose names will be found in Appendix V, have earned the gratitude of not only the Society but of all men and women of goodwill in all countries in co-operating in this task of promoting better understanding of Indian thought in the modern world.

After careful consideration, the Society decided to name this anthology *Towards Universal Man* in order to indicate the goal towards which Tagore was moving throughout his life. Till almost the day of his death, Tagore was growing in stature and depth and in the process, steadily transcended the limitations of nationalism and religious exclusiveness. What is even more interesting is that this expansion of the imagination and the mind did not in his case involve the denial of any element of value in his original social, national and religious background. He was thus a truly universal man whose universality was enriched by incorporating individual values of his age, country and faith.

We may claim that this work is truly international in its scope and aim. Since the first thirty essays were selected by men who are deep students of Tagore in the original and the final selection was made out of these on the advice of eminent scholars in India, Europe and America, it brings together those writings of Tagore which are likely to be of permanent interest and real value to the West and the East alike. Nevertheless, I know that this selection will not please everybody. There are some essays in it which competent critics would leave out ; there are others which they would include. I would only plead that no

anthology can fully satisfy a person except the one he has made himself.

The Society is grateful to all who have co-operated in the execution of this international project. It is indebted to Visva-Bharati, the international University founded by Tagore and owner of the copyright of all Tagore's writings, for permission to translate these essays into English. I am personally grateful to all those who sent their suggestions for the selection of the original thirty essays, to the translators, to our collaborators in India, Europe and America and to all Members of the Society. Shri Kshitish Roy of Santiniketan and Shri Kesavan of the National Library, Calcutta and his colleagues deserve a special mention for the devotion with which they carried out the somewhat dull but important task of preparing notes on the essays and typing and mimeographing the text. Special mention should be made of Dr. Douglas Ensmenger, Representative of the Ford Foundation in India, but for whose active interest it would not have been possible to execute this project with such expedition and dispatch, and Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya who has gone with me over the text of every essay and helped in editing and re-editing them in order to bring the English as close to Tagore's thought as possible. Shri R. N. Roy, my Assistant Private Secretary also spent many of his leisure hours in helping me to get the essays and the introduction into shape. I must also refer to Shri Jayasinghe, Managing Director of Asia Publishing House and Shri Sailendra Nath Guha Ray of Sree Saraswaty Press Ltd., Calcutta, for their part in releasing this book to the public in three continents in almost record time.

Finally, the Society is grateful to Shri Rathindra Nath Tagore, the son of the poet, for his generosity in foregoing all royalties accruing from this book and agreeing to

donate the entire proceeds to the Visva-Bharati for the award of prizes or scholarships to students of Tagore whose mother tongue is not Bengali.

New Delhi,
7th May, 1961

HUMAYUN KABIR

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Introduction

One can never account for the emergence of a genius, for genius is always something in the nature of an exception to the general rule. It is at the same time the function of genius to find expression for the emotions and ideas which stir in the unconscious and subconscious mind of the community. A bond is thus established between the genius and his people, and helps to explain the admiration and wonder with which the genius is greeted when the first flush of amazement is over. Men find in his words and actions an embodiment of the feelings and aspirations which they have dimly felt but could not express. The genius also benefits by such relation. He derives his strength and energy from the inchoate feelings and vague aspirations stirring in the mind of the common man. Tagore is typical of genius in both respects. His uniqueness is beyond question and at the same time he is deeply rooted in the life of the people whom he loved and lived for.

Tagore was fortunate in both the time and the place of his birth. The advent of the West had disturbed the placid waters of Indian life and a new awakening was seeping throughout the land. Its initial impact had dazzled the Indian mind and so impressed some of the early reformers that they at times seemed to be blind imitators of the West. We may today laugh at some of their excesses but without their wholehearted and courageous acceptance of western

thought, the Indian Renaissance would not have been so swift and far-reaching. Forces of social inertia are everywhere strong. In India with her hoary traditions, they were almost irresistible. The redoubts of conservatism could be stormed only by a band whose faith in new values bordered on fanaticism.

The first uncritical admiration could not of course endure. The enthusiasm for western values led to a deeper study of the literature, philosophy and religion of the West. Greater knowledge brought with it a deeper understanding that took note of both strength and failings. Simultaneously, there was increased knowledge and regard for the values of the East. Western scholars like Sir William Jones helped to rediscover some of the great treasures of our own heritage. Raja Rammohan Ray started as an Arabic and Sanskrit scholar but soon undertook a deep study of western thought. Versed in both eastern and western religions, he was able to proclaim that the highest principles of life and existence had been first formulated in the East. He established the Brahmo Samaj and proved that western values could be integrated with the ancient traditions of India. It is not surprising that the members of the Brahmo Samaj played a role in the Indian Renaissance that was far greater than one would expect from a consideration of their number.

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan tried to do for the Muslims, but not with equal success, what Raja Rammohan Ray did for the Hindus. His reinterpretation of the teachings of Islam in the light of western knowledge was another example of the attempt at reconciling eastern and western values. There were parallel movements in the Arya Samaj in the Punjab and the Prarthana Samaj in western and southern India. These movements differ in details but they all indi-

cate an attempt to reconcile the teachings of ancient religions with the discoveries of modern science. The first flush of enthusiasm for the West was thus giving place to a balanced appraisal when Tagore was born. The ideals it had brought were still active and strong but there was at the same time a growing recognition of the values of India's own heritage.

It was not only the time but also the place which was opportune. Bengal had felt the impact of the West earlier and more vividly than perhaps any other part of India. In Bengal the stirrings of life were most marked in Calcutta. To this city and its environs came not only adventurers of trade and war but also administrators, missionaries and more important still, men who were born teachers. And they came not only from the British isles but also from Portugal, Holland, France and other parts of Europe. Russia was in those days far and remote but we still find among the early pioneers of the Calcutta theatre a Russian name. The meeting of East and West on India's shores was thus for Tagore both a fact and an ideal.

The circumstances of his family also helped in the flowering of Tagore's genius. Originally from East Bengal, the family had become rich and prosperous during the later Mughal days. Co-operation with the ruling powers had brought wealth and culture but had also attracted the disapprobation of the orthodox. We do not know much about this early period but by the time the East India Company had established itself, the Tagore family was recognized as among the leaders of Calcutta's new aristocracy. Tagore's grandfather, known as Prince Dwarakanath for his splendid living, was one of the staunchest supporters of Rammohan Ray in his crusade for the spread of western education. It is said of Tagore's father that he began his

mornings with recitations from the Upanishads and Hafiz. Known as the *Maharshi* for his piety and faith he became the most important leader of the Brahmo Samaj after the death of Rammohan Ray. Deeply steeped in the Upanishadic and the Islamic traditions, the Tagore family was thus at the same time one of the pioneers of western education and the western way of life.

The peculiar status of the family helps to explain the combination of tradition and experiment that characterised Tagore's attitude to life. It had already produced three generations of exceptionally able men when Tagore was born. Rich and well-known, the family still had an invidious position among the Brahmins. Inter-dining with the Tagore family invited social disapproval and inter-marriage ostracism by the orthodox. Conscious of its wealth and talents, the family reacted by a proud unconcern with many of the social taboos of the day. Tagore's grandfather went to Britain in defiance of contemporary conventions. Tagore's father was a leader of revolt against orthodoxy in his championship of the Brahmo faith. Tagore's elder brother Satyendranath was the first Indian to compete successfully in the Indian Civil Service and Satyendranath's wife set a new fashion in women's dress that gradually spread from Bengal through large parts of India.

We cannot at this distance of time appreciate the shock with which orthodox Hindu society received Rammohan Ray's enunciation of the Brahmo faith. For centuries, the attacks on Hinduism had been from external sources, first by Islam and then by Christianity. The movements initiated by the medieval saints were more often than not the result of the impact of the unitarian and democratic faith of Islam. These medieval saints did not however reject many of the beliefs of Hinduism. Deities in the

Hindu pantheon soon found a place in their tenets. Rammohan Ray refused to compromise with what he regarded as intellectual aberrations. His monotheism could satisfy the most insistent follower of Islam. His stern unitarianism and rejection of rituals is reminiscent of the early days of Islam or the Puritan movement in Europe. What irritated the orthodox even more was that Rammohan Ray used the Upanishads and other Hindu scriptures to prove his points. The Maharshi was equally a devotee of the Upanishads and equally uncompromising in his antipathy to polytheism or idolatry in any form.

Tagore was thus born in a family where the atmosphere was charged with deep religious feelings and yet free from adherence to forms and rituals. He accepted without any mental reservation the ancient traditions of India and was deeply influenced not only by the literature but by the religious and cultural ideals imbedded in Sanskrit. The history of his family made him familiar with the medieval ways of life and he could accept without any question the composite culture that had grown under Mughal rule. In both these respects, he was perhaps not different from other Brahmin Zamindars of the day but unlike many of them, his family background made him sensitive also to the new currents of the modern world.

Tagore had a sane and sympathetic understanding of western values, but this was accompanied by an acute perception of the evils that follow from their mechanical adoption. He stated with clarity and vision the damage done to spontaneity and native gifts by attempting to force them into the mould of an alien culture, but at the same time he was always prepared to welcome and incorporate elements of value from any source. Shaped by the tradi-

tions of ancient and medieval India and at the same time a pioneer of the Indian awakening, his family accepted the challenges of a new age without giving up the rich heritage of the past. This family background helps to explain both the richness of his Indian heritage and his readiness to accept new ideas from the West. Herein also lies the secret of Tagore's amazing capacity to combine tradition and experiment in all his activities.

There is one other factor which helped Tagore in establishing his identity with the people. In his early youth, his father asked him to look after the family estates. Many were surprised that the Maharshi should select his youngest son, already known as a poet and dreamer, to be in charge of the family properties. Tagore soon proved that his father had acted wisely in making a poet the manager of an estate. What is of interest to us is that this made Tagore live for years in the villages of East Bengal. Much of this time he spent on a boat among the sandbanks of the Padma, and thus came into intimate contact with nature and man in rural Bengal. The quality of life he experienced in these regions was rooted in the primeval and ancient history of the land. Its culture goes back even deeper into the life of the people than the urban culture developed in the middle ages. Tagore thus secured entry into a world unknown to the majority of the new educated class and struck roots in some of the deepest levels of the collective consciousness of the people.

Tagore's greatest strength lies in his sense of the unity of life. No bifurcation of ideals or culture divided his energies. It is therefore not surprising that he should recognize no separation between art and life. The close of the nineteenth century saw in Europe the triumph of a new aesthetic cult. There were many who held that art must

be pursued for its own sake, regardless of its relation to life. The ivory tower became the symbol and type of artistic endeavour. The poet and the artist, said the votaries of this cult, were first and foremost dreamers. The ideal had attracted Tagore in his adolescence, but the discipline of managing the family estates brought him into contact with the sorrows and joys of the common man. After this it was perhaps impossible for him to accept a conception of art divorced from life. He pursued beauty, but as a manifestation of life. Simultaneously, he held that life has no grace unless it is instinct with beauty. The religion of the poet was for Tagore also the religion of man.

II

In considering Tagore's life and work, one is again and again struck by the amazing versatility of his genius. He was essentially a poet but his interests were not confined to poetry. In sheer quantity of work few writers can equal him. His writings include more than one thousand poems and over two thousand songs in addition to a large number of short stories, novels, dramatic works and essays on the most diverse topics. In quality too he has reached heights which have been trodden and that too rarely by only the noblest among men.

The diversity of his literary work is thus amazing but literature in its widest sense could not exhaust his energies. He was also a musician of the highest order. He took to painting when he was almost seventy and yet produced within ten years about three thousand pictures—some of them of exceptional quality. In addition, he made notable contributions to religious and educational thought, to politics and social reform, to moral regeneration and eco-

nomic reconstruction. His achievements in all these fields are so great that they mark him out as one of the greatest sons of India and indeed one who has a message for entire mankind. The present selection of his writings is intended to draw the attention of the world to some of these lesser known aspects of his genius.

Let us begin with Tagore the educationist. His ideas on education were derived mainly from his own experience. Restricted life in a city under the supervision of servants made him keenly conscious of children's need for freedom and space. The insistence on routine and particularly the emphasis on subjects in which he was not interested made him react strongly against the methods practised in the schools he attended. He also instinctively felt that the education he was offered was unrelated to our social life and cultural tradition. He has recorded the delight and wonder with which he looked at nature when his father took him for the first time to the Himalayas. It imbued in him the faith that freedom from external impositions and close and constant contact with nature are conditions for the healthy development of the child. He sought to work out a system of education that would pay due consideration to the interests of the child, grow out of the tradition and history of the land and recognize the need of close and constant contact with nature.

The Vicissitudes of Education is important not only as his first major essay on the subject but also because of its emphasis on the study of the mother tongue as a condition for the all-round development of the human personality. He thus became an educational revolutionary but only in the sense that he sought to restore valuable elements which had been forgotten or ignored in the prevailing system. He had the vision and the wisdom to see that a revolution

which seeks to break away completely from tradition ultimately defeats itself. To succeed, a revolution must rediscover forgotten values and reshape them according to the needs of changing times.

It became an article of faith with Tagore that education must develop the personality of the child in the context of nature. He believed that an integrated personality can be achieved only if the child develops its faculties in tune with it. The beauty of nature in its resplendent variety must sink unconsciously into the child's mind. The quietness of the evening and the promise of the morning, the scintillating beauty of the stars and the radiance of the rising sun must permeate the child's personality. Tagore was not unaware of the clashes and conflicts in the world of nature, but he was convinced that these clashes and conflicts are finally overcome in a larger harmony. As the child became conscious of the harmony in the world outside, there would be harmony also in his inner nature.

There was no place for narrowness in Tagore's educational ideal. He did not believe in suppressing any aspect of human nature and held that the harmonious development of all the faculties can alone lead to an integrated personality. True education must develop the intellect as well as the emotions and the will and achieve harmony with nature and balance between the different subjects of study. In *The Problem of Education,* he said that these objects can be best attained in a residential school. There the children can be brought into intimate and daily contact with nature. They can at the same time imbibe the national traditions through close personal association with dedicated teachers. It was to give shape to these ideals and frame a programme that would develop harmoniously

different aspects of the child's personality that Tagore started his own school at Santiniketan.

Tagore held that the development of the child can be best achieved through activity of many kinds. He declared more than once that there can be no greater cruelty to a child than to force it to sit still. A child is naturally active and Tagore's school sought from its inception to utilize activity as an essential part of education. Tagore's educational ideals have been shared by other educationists and many of his innovations have now become part of general educational practice, but his special contribution lay in the emphasis on harmony, balance and all-sided development of personality. For him, beauty had to be related to the moral and morality had to be imbued with the spirit of beauty if man was to attain the truth. In this way, the three values of truth, beauty and goodness were fused in his educational ideal.

Basic education which is the accepted pattern of elementary education in independent India owes some of its most important elements to Tagore's thought and practice. He declared again and again that the school must not be cut off from the social and economic life of the people. In *A Poet's School* he said that the pupils must, as in the old forest hermitages of India, combine household duties with their academic work. The emphasis on craft which is one of the essential features of basic education is thus implicit in his theory but Tagore would not have accepted the insistence on compulsory spinning advocated by some of its more fanatical adherents. For Tagore, freedom and spontaneity are more important than adherence to routine. It is not surprising that whenever the supporters of basic education have deviated from Tagore, they are almost always in the wrong.

Tagore not only professed these ideals but drew up programmes to give them practical and concrete shape. His emphasis on the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction grew out of his recognition that education is most effective when it is unconsciously imbibed. An alien language however rich has its own associations and atmosphere. As these are unfamiliar to the child, they impose a strain on his mind. If a child hears something in an alien speech, his mind is divided between the subject and the language while anything taught in the mother tongue leads to no such division of his attention. Tagore declared that Indian children must draw upon the immense intellectual, moral and cultural resources of the world outside but should do so from the basis of a firm grounding in their own language, tradition and culture.

With Tagore's faith in the dignity of the individual it was natural that he should pay the greatest attention to the personality of the teacher. In *The Problem of Education,* he states that the first task is to find a real teacher. Once this has been done, the questions of syllabus, methods of teaching and discipline of students can easily be settled. The living example of a teacher is far more important than his professions or even his knowledge. For Tagore, mere erudition is a burden but when it is lit by dedicated faith, it gives light and warmth to countless generations. He declared that learning is a continuous process and becomes real only when there is a meeting of the mind of the teacher and the taught. He compared education to the lighting of one lamp from another and said that a real teacher is like a lighted lamp. Once the teacher ceases to learn, the lamp goes out.

Tagore's emphasis on individual endeavour and freedom

explains why he was no believer in rigid rules. With all his devotion to Indian ideals and traditions, he recognized that the impact of the West demands modifications in their formulation. He was always ready to accept innovations and declared that change is the law of life. He therefore discouraged attempts to copy his own teachings and taught that it is only through change that the values of the spirit can be maintained. He held that each country and each community has its own peculiar culture and special needs. Every age and every society must therefore re-shape ancient ideals to suit its own requirements. The increasing contacts between different peoples and civilizations demand greater knowledge and understanding of the different ways in which men have solved the problems they faced. These solutions may be local in origin but they are universal in their validity. In *The Unity of Education,* Tagore declared that India with the great diversity of her languages and her peoples has a special role to play in the development of an international outlook.

The Centre of Indian Culture is in its combinaton of nationalism and internationalism one of the most important statements of Tagore's educational ideals. The central theme of his writings before he had established the school at Santiniketan was the importance of imparting education in the mother tongue. After the establishment of the school, he was engrossed in the task of building up a residential school where the national tradition would be taught in the context of close association with nature. As his experience and his sympathies grew, he went on to establish Visva-Bharati as an international University where the values of the East and the West could be combined to develop a truly universal and humanitarian outlook based on faith in man.

III

We may now turn to Tagore's contribution to our economic thought. He often referred with admiration to the balanced economy which had developed in India in ancient times and spoke almost with a feeling of nostalgia of the employment, security and contentment it had offered to generations of Indians. This may appear a little puzzling to the non-Indian reader, for he has more often than not heard of the poverty and distress that mark Indian rural life. Tagore was not unaware of the limitations of India's village economy but he held that its combination of agriculture and small scale industry had in a simpler age met the simple requirements of the people.

We have also to remember that the Indian village differs in many ways from the village as known to Europe and America. Instead of each family living among its own fields, the Indian village is generally a concentration of many households with their holdings scattered over great distances. The village community in India is thus close and compact and generally larger than the village in Europe. Villages with a population of four or five thousand are not rare and there are occasionally villages with as many as ten thousand inhabitants. Often, and specially in the north and the north-west, they are walled and in some respects resemble the small town or township. By the skilful interweaving of agriculture and industry, and because of their comparatively larger population, the Indian village was till the advent of the modern age largely self-sufficient and the home of a contented community.

With all his admiration for the villages of ancient India, Tagore recognized that changing times had destroyed the

base of their economy and they could no longer survive in their early form. The Industrial Revolution of Europe had made the simple techniques of a rural economy obsolete. The increasing use of the machine expanded production and demanded larger markets. Tagore held that we must march with the times and adopt the newest techniques if we are to keep abreast with the rest of the civilized world.

Tagore was no obscurantist and gladly welcomed the introduction of the machine into the Indian economy. On more occasions than one he declared that India's true interests would not be served by clinging to outmoded techniques. He recognized the value of handicrafts and freely admitted that some of the most beautiful manufactures are the product of manual labour and skill. At the same time, he recognized that if we are to provide the necessary goods and services to all members of society, the machine will have to be increasingly used. The machine has liberated man from the burden of his daily toil and drudgery. We must therefore accept the machine without any mental reservations, but we must always use it as the slave of man, not his master.

Tagore knew that the adoption of the machine and introduction of improved techniques may create temporary unemployment. In *Co-operation* he has pointed out that this is not a necessary consequence of mechanization. In Europe, improvements in techniques and increases in wealth have invariably led to the creation of new types of professions and trades. It is only in primitive societies that we find surplus labour. In advanced communities, the more machines are used, the greater seems to be the shortage of manpower. There is no reason why this should not happen also in India. He greatly admired the energy and

initiative of western man who was continually finding new avenues of employment and new uses for his leisure. It is interesting to note that the ideal that independent India has adopted in her attempts to reshape her economic life conforms largely to Tagore's vision. It is an economic pattern that recognizes the need for machine-made goods as well as handicrafts, accepts both heavy and light industry, places equal emphasis on capital and consumer goods and finds a place for both public and private enterprise and initiative.

Tagore was of the view that one of the misfortunes of India in the modern age has been that *Shree*—grace and beauty—has left the villages. The very word civilization suggests that it has something to do with cities. In the West, civilization has therefore become increasingly urban. This concentration of population in cities and towns has become still more marked in the modern age. Throughout the world there is a steady drift of the abler men and women from rural to urban areas. Tagore held that this was an unfortunate development but it could be checked only through a transformation of village life. In *City and Village*, he has drawn a distinction between the civilization which has developed in the West and the culture which had developed in ancient India. The culture of India was not only based on the village but accepted nature as an essential element for man's all-round development. In his view, Europe's mistake lay in attempting to conquer Nature: it was wiser, he held, to achieve harmony with her. He contrasted the way in which European settlers sought to destroy the forests in the vast plains of North America with the Aryan acceptance of the forest and its gradual transformation into the *tapovana* or sylvan retreat of sages and saints.

Quite early in his life, Tagore realized that it is impossible to turn back the tide of time. In *Society and State,* and again in *Presidential Address,* he pointed out that the present drift of able men and women to the town cannot be stopped by admonishing the rural people or declaiming about the beauties of village life. A balance between village and town can be achieved only by changing the conditions of rural life and overcoming the great gap which today exists between them. Villages must provide adequate opportunities of education, health and self-expression to their inhabitants before we can expect the able to remain villagers. Only when the amenities which attract young men and women to towns are created in villages and people find there adequate opportunities for self-expression will the present drift of able men and women to the town stop.

One other element in Tagore's economic thought deserves mention. He was a great believer in the co-operative movement and was indeed one of India's first and greatest co-operators. The essay on *Co-operation* only reiterates what he had often pointed out before, that the individual villager may be poor, but if many villagers pool their resources, they can accomplish tasks which are individually beyond their competence. Tagore's faith in action and positive measures also helps to explain why he urged his countrymen to adopt measures of social and economic reconstruction on their own initiative without waiting at every step for help and assistance from the Government.

Tagore sought to implement in the villages around Santiniketan his programme for the reconstruction of the economic, social and cultural life of the village. It is no exaggeration to say that Indian agriculture and village economy had hardly changed in the last three thousand

years. It is in Tagore's programme of rural reconstruction that we find after centuries the first conscious attempt to transform methods of agriculture and build up a new system of rural economy and rural finance. As early as the nineties of the last century, Tagore said that there could be no question of the economic regeneration or the political freedom of the country till people in the villages regained their initiative and self-respect. His programmes at Santiniketan, and later at Sriniketan in co-operation with Mr. Elmhirst, were intended to bring back dynamism and dignity to the people of rural India. The physical results of his efforts might not have been great, and Tagore himself believed in small beginnings, but the experiment is significant because of the general awakening it brought about among the people of the area. There was in particular a keen interest in the programmes of mass education and rural health that was in sharp contrast to the apathy and indolence which had obtained before. To regenerate the countryside is one of the greatest tasks of independent India. The inspiration as well as the programme owe greatly to the conception and experience of Tagore.

IV

Tagore demanded a combination of tradition and experiment for the regeneration of our economic life. He wanted to introduce the latest techniques of western science while taking steps to retain the freedom and dignity of the individual. He also sought to combine in his economic pattern agriculture and industry in a way that would be most conducive to the co-operation of the village and the town. In all this, he was guided by a philosophy of creative unity whose aim was to achieve harmony and

balance among the different elements that constitute the rich and complex society of India.

In politics also, Tagore sought for the same combination of the finest elements from India and the West. He believed that gifts injure both the donor and the recipient unless they have *shraddha* or respect for one another. For him a journey to Europe was almost a pilgrimage. *On the Eve of Departure* gives a clear indication of the spirit of reverence with which, in spite of the strong political passions that divided Britain and India, Tagore approached western values. In *The Changing Age*, he points out how the impact of the West imposed external bonds but profoundly changed our attitude to authority and freed us, perhaps for ever, from acquiescence with evil which in the past has been one of our national failings.

Tagore unhesitatingly accepted the western idea of democracy but to this he added the Indian conception of social initiative and social responsibility. He pointed out that in ancient and medieval India, kings might have given wealth and political power but the richest and the most powerful men were not satisfied till they had received the approbation of their community. This made many of the social welfare activities independent of the power of the State and encouraged initiative and philanthropy in the individual members of society.

Tagore's insistence that Indians must themselves provide the nation-building services without always looking to the State was derived from his regard for the ancient Indian tradition of social responsibility. It also fitted in with the prevailing western belief in individual initiative. His whole political outlook was consistent with the doctrine that that Government is best which governs the least. He may have been influenced by the great liberal tradition of the

western world when he said that the major services of the community should be performed by individuals and groups in free association rather than through the controlled directives of the State.

A distinction between the State and the community is inherent in Tagore's thought. He believed that progress lies in circumscribing the functions of the State and transferring them to the community. He was thus a strong supporter of local self-government in every sphere of life. The individual finds fulfilment only when he is autonomous. The community also flourishes when it is responsible for its own welfare. He was therefore for decentralization of authority and held that the State should deal only with those aspects of social life which cannot be administered by the individual or the group. In a word, his conception of politics was essentially that of a decentralized and federative state in which local units would increasingly play a more important role.

Tagore extended the principle of autonomy to exalt the role of the individual in both economic and political action. Even before the publication of *Society and State,* he declared that our political bondage is merely a symptom of our inner weakness. He held that a merely political programme could not bring about the liberation of India, for this only dealt with the symptoms. When individuals become self-reliant and develop knowledge, moral purpose and aesthetic perception, India would forthwith become free. He held that much of the politics of the day was unreal and merely agitational: a few English-educated people spoke to one another without seeking the participation of the masses in a national struggle for liberation. If education had remained unsatisfactory because of an alien medium, political action was even more unsatisfactory for

the same reason. He declared that the people would respond with enthusiasm if they were approached in a way they could understand.

Presidential Address has a special importance as it was the only occasion when Tagore presided over a political conference. Besides, this was the first time that an Indian President of a political gathering spoke to his Indian audience in an Indian language. In this address, Tagore gave an outline of his political programme and declared that we must work for economic self-sufficiency and social freedom. The roots of India's bondage lay in her neglect of the individual and her acceptance of a social system which had condemned millions of her children to indignity and humiliation. He repeatedly proclaimed that unless Indians established equality among themselves, it was futile for them to demand equality with nationals of other countries.

Tagore accepted the ideal of Indian nationalism, but what distinguished him from most of the national leaders of the day was his consciousness that independence would be achieved not by denunciation of the British but by the cultivation of the positive virtues of manliness and self-help. In spite of the provocation caused by oppressive political, economic and cultural conditions, Tagore was singularly free from rancour towards the British. In spite of the deeply morbid relationship of Britain and India, Tagore was quick to recognize British virtues even when he attacked British measures. His denunciation of the British in India was more often than not based on his acceptance of the ideals that the British themselves had preached. Even when he seemed totally disillusioned with the West, a disillusionment he has expressed most vividly in *Crisis in Civilization*, he proclaimed his faith in the humanity of the best representatives of the West. He was therefore

able to focus his attention on the best elements in the thought, practice and purposes of the western world and make vigorous and repeated efforts for their appreciation and assimilation by his own people.

It is not surprising that Tagore should be one of the greatest internationalists of the modern age. He recognized the right of each nation to work out its own destiny, but he also proclaimed that national claims must never encroach upon our human obligations. Love and respect for the ideals of one's own people is a positive virtue, while disrespect for the ideals and traditions of others is a crime against humanity. Tagore condemned in unqualified terms the aggressive nationalism which had raised the Nation State to the status of a demi-god. He proclaimed that blind worship of the nation and the Nation State contained the seeds of diaster for man.

Tagore recognized the elements of value in Indian and western culture but condemned whatever he regarded as narrow or reactionary in their tradition or in practice. Whenever he thought it necessary, he criticized freely and fearlessly both his own countrymen and foreigners. He had great affection and admiration for Mahatma Gandhi but this did not prevent him from criticizing in the strongest terms what he regarded as the negative or restrictive elements in the Mahatma's thought and practice. In *The Call of Truth* and again in *The Striving for Swaraj,* he challenged some of the basic assumptions of the Mahatma and declared that a part of the programme the Mahatma had drawn up was against the principles he had himself enunciated.

Tagore was not a professional politician but the sufferings of the Indian people moved him to political action and utterance at every critical stage of the national

struggle. He became the bard and spokesman of the Swadeshi movement in 1905. In 1919, it was again he who first raised his voice of protest against the atrocities at Jalianwalabagh. He would not however let his passionate condemnation of the political action of the Government affect his respect for the British people. He wanted Indian political action to be a positive programme of national regeneration rather than a blind reaction against foreign rule. In the days of the Swadeshi movement of 1905 and again at the height of the non-co-operation movement in 1920, he did not hesitate to express his stern disapproval of certain aspects of the national political programme when these, he felt, were negative rather than constructive.

Tagore was a strong believer in the dignity of the individual and the value of freedom and initiative for all nations. In *East and West* he reiterated his passionate belief that India's special contribution to world civilization lay in the exaltation of the principle of unity in diversity. He held that differences are in themselves valuable and add to the richness of life. He believed that there is a divine purpose in the diversity of languages, religions and cultures which are found in Indian life. He proclaimed that the unity of India has been and should always be a unity in diversity in which every language, every religion and every culture must have its due place. We can easily see how much more this applies to the nations which inhabit the modern world.

The impact of Tagore's ideals on the political consciousness of modern India can be seen in many ways. Internally, India has elected to be a federation in which each of her constituent units is guaranteed the fullest autonomy. His may not have been the first or the only voice but his was certainly one of the most insistent in the demand for the

equality of all Indian citizens regardless of caste, community, religion, language or sex. Externally, respect for divergent political beliefs of different nations and insistence that unity among them must be achieved not through suppression of diversity but by recognizing their place in a system are immediate results of the philosophy he preached. He declared that whenever there is an attempt to suppress the personality of any group or individual within a country, the whole country suffers. Similarly, the world suffers when any nation or group is denied the right of free and full self-development. *Hindu University* ostensibly deals with an educational problem but it is also a re-statement of Tagore's faith that India's salvation lies in the unity, not the uniformity of her diverse peoples.

It is not surprising that with his belief in the value of self-expression for individuals and groups, Tagore should be the first among our national leaders to speak of the need of a secular government which paid equal regard to all religions, communities and faiths. Tagore believed that wherever the principle of respect for the dignity of groups and individuals has been practised, the result has been an immense gain for all concerned. Failure to follow this principle has invariably led to impoverishment and ultimate decay of national culture and prosperity. He held that the only way in which mankind can work out its salvation in the modern world is acceptance of differences among nations in a spirit of mutual respect for all.

This quest to seek the unity of man in the midst of diversity led Tagore to travel to the farthest corners of the world. After the great period of Indian intellectual expansion during the age of the Buddha, Indians had generally tended to withdraw within themselves. During the middle ages there were no doubt contacts with Western Asia and

later in the modern age contacts with Europe. In these contacts after the first millennium of the Christian era, India has however been generally the recipient and not a donor. The decline in the pioneering spirit among Indians was one of the first symptoms of the intellectual and moral decay which led to India's defeat on economic and political planes. For centuries Indians hardly went out of India. For a large majority of the Indian people, a voyage abroad brought personal stigma and social ostracism.

Tagore was the first great Indian in recent times who went out on a cultural mission for restoring contacts and establishing friendship with peoples of other countries without any immediate or specific educational, economic, political or religious aim. It is also remarkable that his cultural journeys were not confined to the western world. He went as an Ambassador of Goodwill to China and Japan, Ceylon and Malaya, Indonesia and Burma, Thailand and Indo-China and Iran and Afghanistan and North and South America. In this way also he helped to broaden the intellectual outlook and emotional contacts of the Indian people. For almost two hundred years Indians had looked at the world through western and in the main British spectacles. Tagore helped to restore the balance by bringing vividly before us the great contributions of our western, eastern, northern and southern neighbours.

Recent history has amply justified Tagore's faith. Science and technology have brought into close contact differing economic and political systems. Different religious and ideological groups which were formerly geographically separated live today in close proximity and must learn to accommodate one another if the world is not to go up in flames. If these differences are allowed to lead to conflict, the results are bound to be disastrous for all.

Tagore taught that these differences should not be suppressed but given their proper place in a larger whole. He pleaded for co-operation and not competition between different nations and different ideals, for according to him, interdependence and *not* independence can alone solve the problems of the modern age.

V

Tagore's educational, social, economic and political beliefs were all coloured by his deep religious faith. His father was a devoted student of the Upanishads and the Sufi mystics, and from him Tagore imbibed his deep sense of the unity of life. He has recorded how, when he was yet in his teens, one day he suddenly experienced a vivid bond of kinship with nature and man. This gave us one of his greatest lyrics, but even more, it gave him in early youth the guiding principle of his life.

Tagore had a vision of reality in which the supreme values were those of truth, beauty and goodness. His educational programme in which he emphasized the harmony between nature and man was derived from his consciousness of the unity that underlies all being. His regard for the individual in economics and politics was derived from the consciousness that all individuals are ultimately at one with the Absolute. His emphasis on co-operation between peoples in the political sphere was derived as much from his respect for different viewpoints as his feeling that all men are the children of God. He believed that clashes and conflicts arise only when we place undue emphasis on our sectional interests. In *What Then ?* he declared that it is only when we rise to the consciousness of the unity of the universe that all sectional claims find their proper place.

He believed that religion is the highest value of life because it emphasizes unity and love for all beings.

With this deep sense of the unity of life, it was natural that Tagore's view of religion should be synoptic and not sectional. He accepted life wholly and without any mental reservations and was not prepared to discard any of the essential elements in human nature. He proclaimed again and again that he was no believer in asceticism. In his view, the individual will find salvation only when he accepts his manifold obligations to his fellow beings. The attempt to suppress emotions or aesthetic sensibilities will lead only to violent reactions that may threaten the very foundations of our being. We must accept the joys and cares of life and find fulfilment in the performance of the duties of every day. An integrated personality can be achieved only by the harmonious development of all our faculties. Society will be truly progressive only when the majority of its members have achieved harmony in their personal lives.

With this emphasis on the flowering of the personality it was inevitable that Tagore should place a greater emphasis on the spirit than on the letter of religious observances. He again and again said that while rituals have their place in religious life, their validity depends upon the genuineness and sincerity of beliefs. *The Master's Will Be Done* is a brilliant study of the way in which men lose their soul when they follow the letter rather than the spirit of a law. This applies to customs and traditions, to economic, social and political matters, and even more to religion. Nothing in the world is static and hence religious observances must also change. A dogma is an attempt to restrict in forms and rituals what was originally an immediate spiritual experience. When the original urge has

become weak, the form often seeks to usurp its place. In such a context, the spirit of religion itself demands that the old forms must change and new ones evolve to meet the requirement of new generations. Rituals and rites must never be exalted over the reality of the immediate experience which in Tagore's view is unique and immutable for all men and all times.

Tagore at times described his religion as the Religion of Man. What he perhaps intended to convey was that the human individual is a unit of consciousness in a cosmic consciousness. According to him, God manifests Himself in man in the sense that it is through human activity that He realises Himself in the universe. The evolution of the universe is a co-operative adventure in which man is not only a recipient but also a donor. At times, Tagore played with the idea that just as our personality is implicit in every corpuscle of our body, the reality of God is immanent in every single human individual. If these corpuscles could become self-conscious, they would perhaps think of themselves as independent individualities. Similarly, men think of themselves as distinct personalities, but in fact they are moments in the Personality of God.

The mystic element in Tagore's religious thought is matched by his immediate concern with the affairs of practical life. This follows from his belief that salvation for the individual and the race will be found not in some remote region of reality outside the reach of our daily life but in the simple joys and sorrows which make up the world of day to day. He placed the greatest emphasis on human relations, for only through their common life can men achieve individual salvation and social fulfilment. As members of one social organism, all individuals were to him equally valuable and that is why he repudiated so

strongly those elements in Indian social and religious practice which discriminate between man and man. Ancient Indian sages had laid the greatest emphasis on self-knowledge. To this Tagore added, perhaps under the influence of Islam and Christianity, that it is equally important for man to know and love his neighbours. His religion was thus one essentially of equality, self-expression and neighbourly love as expressed in our everyday life of thought and action.

Tagore's religion was thus an essential part of his being and influenced every aspect of his life. A magnificent example of the way in which it coloured his political attitudes and beliefs is seen in the song he wrote for a session of the Congress and which has today become the Indian National Anthem. It is true that the song is full of references to the landscape and geography of India, but this local colour is transfused by a deep feeling for all mankind that makes it more a religious hymn than a patriotic song. Tagore begins with an invocation to the Lord of the heart of all the peoples of the world and sings the praise of the Eternal Charioteer Who has guided man through the ups and downs of history. He seeks welfare not for India alone but for East and West and North and South, and indeed the anthem is meant not for the people of India alone but for all mankind. The Indian National Anthem reflects Tagore's ideal of a world where there will be friendship and co-operation among all men and mutual regard and respect among all peoples. He sings of endeavour and co-operative reconstruction of the world where every individual will be guaranteed the dignity and the rights of a civilized man in a civilized world. In one word, this hymn sums up Tagore's faith in the march towards universal man.

VI

One may in conclusion ask: what is Tagore's significance for the modern world? He was not primarily a political or social reformer or an educationist but the essays in this book will show that he had important contributions to make in every one of these fields. He was essentially a poet and writer with the message which artists have not only for their own people and age but for all peoples and all ages. Above all, and because of all this, he was an immense national and world figure whose constant striving towards universality points the way towards the solution of the most pressing problems of the modern age.

The simplicity and sincerity of the *Gitanjali* took Europe by storm. Here was a human voice that rung true in the midst of the clash and conflict which threatened death and destruction to man. Tagore's message struck an immediate chord in the heart of war-weary humanity. Both during the first World War and in the years immediately thereafter, he was hailed by the West as a seer and sage. After a decade of admiration bordering almost on adulation, his fame however began to ebb in the western world. Some said that his poems were too thin and ethereal to satisfy the claims of full-blooded men and women. Others found in him a strain of sentimentality which however attractive at first soon palled upon the taste. About his discourses and essays it was said that they were unduly prolific, didactic and dull,—repetitive and platitudinous in spite of a poetic image here or a happy phrase there. These modernist detractors of Tagore said that his poems lacked in intensity and passion while his essays were cloudy, vague, lengthy and non-logical in spite of his earnest desire for the uplift of man.

Tagore's standing as a poet is so unquestioned that it is not necessary even to discuss these aspersions of his critics. In any case, the present volume is concerned solely with his essays and it is for the reader to judge how far these criticisms are justified. One thing however may be conceded straightaway. Many of these essays were addresses intended to rouse his countrymen from the stupor into which they had fallen. They mark the heroic efforts of a man who was seeking almost singlehanded to transform the medieval mentality of his people into a modern outlook in the course of one generation. This expains their rhetoric and their repetitiveness, characteristics that are found in the writings of many of his contemporaries in India and elsewhere. What distinguishes them and makes them almost unique is his remarkable freedom from rancour or bitterness.

We often forget that the whole of Tagore's adult life was passed in a tense atmosphere of rising and developing nationalism in India. The advent of the British had set in motion a revolution that was not confined to a revolt against the old social and religious beliefs of the country. It soon assumed the form of a rebellion against economic exploitation and political domination by the British. The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 when Tagore was twenty-four. Started originally to secure for Indians civil liberties and a greater share in the public services, the Congress had by the end of the century become a militant organization that fought for national liberty. The first decade of the twentieth century saw the rise of a terrorist cult which sought to achieve independence through political murders. The whole atmosphere was surcharged with passion and bitterness and it speaks of Tagore's great spiritual strength that he could main-

tain an objective, detached and humane point of view in the midst of all this turmoil.

We have also to remember that Indian nationalism was from the beginning largely mixed with Hindu revivalism. The terrorists who sought to bring about a revolution in Indian society were at the same time influenced by the cult of *Kali*. Even when they spoke of independent India, many of the earlier political leaders thought mainly in terms of the philosophy and culture developed under the influence of Hinduism. They sought to reject not merely the elements that had been brought by the British but also the common culture which had grown over a thousand years through the joint efforts of Hindus and Muslims. It is also a fact that though these political leaders spoke in terms of India, more often than not they thought in terms of their own province or community. Readers of these essays will note that even Tagore's interests often seemed to be concentrated on Bengal and Bengalees. Some critics have gone so far as to hold that till about 1908, Tagore was more concerned with Bengal than India, and even in Bengal, his sympathies were directed more towards those who followed the Hindu faith.

Whatever may be said about other leaders of the day, it would not be correct to describe Tagore in such narrow terms. Brought up in an atmosphere of deep and almost militant unitarianism, his family background ensured an immediate sympathy with his Muslim and Christian fellow-countrymen. We thus find in his earliest writings a consciousness of the great diversity of India's culture and the need to conserve all elements of value in a harmonious synthesis. In fact, he was one of the few Indians to emphasize from the very outset that India would achieve greatness not by the suppression of any element in her

composite life but by their proper development and synthesis in a larger whole. His concern with Bengal is to be explained in terms of his belief that all constructive activities must start from one's own immediate environment. He repeatedly stressed that political and social workers must concentrate on their own neighbourhood. He used to say that if even one village could carry out the programme he had visualized, it would act like a lamp from which light would radiate in all directions.

Another reason for Tagore's concern with Bengal may be found in the role which Bengal had played in the earlier phases of the Indian Renaissance. The impact of the West was felt first and most vividly in the eastern region of India. Not only the literary but also the social and political renaissance started in Bengal. Still another reason may have been one purely of strategy. Tagore perhaps felt that he could write with greater authority on conditions in Bengal and admonish Bengalees in stronger terms than peoples from other parts of India. Tagore may have begun as a Bengalee poet who in his twenties had been primarily concerned with the quest for beauty but the discipline of managing the family estates soon taught him that the poet must come out of the ivory tower and share in the joys and sorrows of his fellow men. This led to a growing interest in social, economic and political questions. With a poet's vision he saw that a harmonious society can be built only when the individuals constituting it become integrated personalities. His thought turned to education and he sought to work out a system that would offer the individual the opportunity of the fullest self-development in harmony with nature and society.

As Tagore's vision and sympathies grew, he increasingly recognized that while one's own native culture has an

immediate appeal and value, it must find its place in the wider synthesis of a truly universal human civilization. The terrorist activities that followed the Partition of Bengal convinced him that Indian independence could not be achieved through short cuts. He also recognized that the different Indian communities could not be united either on the basis of hatred for the foreigner or on the basis of self-interest alone. Such associations might serve temporary purposes but could provide no bond of permanent unity. They must therefore be bound together by their devotion to common ideals. He condemned violence not because of any abstract belief in non-violence, but because he thought that such methods are essentially attempts at short-circuiting history.

Throughout his long and fruitful life, Tagore was continually striving for the attainment of a point of view that was truly universal and human. He was deeply influenced by the ideal of Hinduism as expressed in the Upanishads, but his nationalism from the beginning recognized the great multiplicity and variety of Indian life and the need to provide for the full and free development of all elements. In course of time, he also realized that nationalism itself is not adequate for a world unified by modern science and technology. He proclaimed that interdependence of peoples and countries rather than their independence must be the principle for life and progress today and tomorrow.

In this process of increasing concern with the whole world, Tagore also realized that India—if she is to make her contribution to a universal humanism—must adopt a positive and creative attitude to all problems. According to him, acceptance and not rejection is the basic principle of life, but life at the same time demands that whatever is dead must be discarded. He never hesitated to criticize

elements in Indian life and practice which were effete or reactionary. Nor was he prepared to condone signs of weakness in western civilization. If on the one hand he condemned the lethargy and superstitiousness of the East, on the other he denounced the West's exaggerated nationalism and concern with material things. He had started with an ardent belief that the springs of a new and truly human civilization would issue out of the heart of Europe. In the last essay he wrote, he painfully confessed that his faith in the West had been shaken. This has hurt some western critics of Tagore, but they forget that Tagore was equally unsparing in his criticism of his friends and colleagues in India. With all his admiration for Mahatma Gandhi he did not hesitate to criticize him strongly on specific issues. With all his admiration for the West, he never hesitated to condemn the exaggerated status it gave to material wealth and national pride.

Tagore however never lost his faith in man. Even while he criticized the Mahatma, he recognized his greatness as a human being. When he expressed his disappointment with the West, he at the same time referred with pride and gratitude to the great-hearted westerners whom he had known and counted as his friends. The same themes run through all his essays: the unity of mankind, the transforming power of truth, the evils of all forms of partisanship and provincialism, of dogmatism, self-segregation, narrowness and self-centredness on the one hand and on the other, of rhetoric, inflation, lack of self-criticism, irresponsible indignation, concealment behind alibis and above all the slavish aping of the standards and values of others. We may conclude this study with the testament which he left to the world in the last essay that he wrote: "And yet I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man,

accepting the present defeat as final. I shall look forward to a turning in history after this cataclysm is over and the sky is again unburdened and passionless. Perhaps the new dawn will come from this horizon, from the East where the sun rises ; and then, unvanquished Man will retrace his path of conquest, despite all barriers, to win back his lost heritage."

Humayun Kabir

Towards Universal Man

The Vicissitudes of Education

HUMAN BEINGS cannot be content with the bare necessaries of life, and they are in fact partly chained to their needs and partly free. The average man is three and a half cubits tall, but he lives in a house that is much taller, and has plenty of room for the freedom of movement so essential for health and comfort. This applies equally to education. A boy should be allowed to read books of his own choice in addition to the prescribed text-books he must read for his school-work. His mental development is likely to be arrested if he is not allowed to do this, and he may grow into a man with the mind of a boy.

Unfortunately a boy in this country has very little time at his disposal. He must learn a foreign language, pass several examinations, and qualify himself for a job, in the shortest possible time. So, what can he do but cram up a few text-books with breathless speed? His parents and his teachers do not let him waste precious time by reading a book of entertainment, and they snatch it away from him the moment they see him with one.

An unkind fate has ruled that the Bengalee boy shall subsist on the lean diet of grammar, lexicon, and

geography. To see him in the class room, his thin legs dangling from his seat, is to see the most unfortunate child in the world. At an age when children of other countries are having all sorts of treats, he must digest his teacher's cane with no other seasoning than the teacher's abuse.

That sort of fare is sure to ruin anybody's digestive organs, and there can be no doubt that for lack of nourishment and recreation the Bengalee boy grows up without fully developing his physical and mental powers. That explains why, although many of us take the highest university degrees and write many books, we as a people have minds that are neither virile nor mature. We cannot get a proper hold on anything, cannot make it stand firm, cannot build it up from bottom to top. We do not talk, think, or act like adults, and we try to cover up the poverty of our minds with overstatement, ostentation and swagger.

This is due mainly to the joyless education our boys receive from childhood onwords, learning a few prescribed text-books by heart, and acquiring a working knowledge of a few subjects instead of mastering them. Human beings need food, and not air, to satisfy their hunger, but they also need air properly to digest their food. Many books of entertainment are likewise necessary for a boy properly to digest one text-book. When a boy reads something for pleasure, his capacity for reading increases imperceptibly, and his powers of comprehension, assimilation and retention grow stronger in an easy and natural manner.

Language is our first difficulty. Because of the many grammatical and syntactical differences between English and our mother-tongue, English is very much a foreign

language to us. Then there is the difficulty connected with the subject matter, which makes an English book doubly foreign to us. Utterly unfamiliar with the life it describes, all we can do is to get the text by rote without understanding it—with the same result as that of swallowing food without chewing it. Suppose a children's Reader in English contains a story about haymaking, and another about a quarrel that Charlie and Katie had when they were snowballing. These stories relate incidents familiar to English children, and interesting and enjoyable to them; but they rouse no memories in the minds of our children, unfold no pictures before their eyes. Our children simply grope about in the dark when reading these books.

A further difficulty stems from the fact that the men who teach the lower forms of our schools are not adequately trained for their work. Some of them have only passed the Matriculation examination, some have not even done that, and all are lacking in adequate knowledge of English language and literature, English life and thought. Yet these are the teachers to whom we owe our introduction to English learning. They know neither good English nor good Bengali, and the only work they can do is misteaching.

Nor can we really blame the poor men. Suppose I have to put the sentence 'The horse is a noble animal' into Bengali. How shall I do it? How can I be true to two languages at the same time? Shall I say the horse is a 'great' animal, a 'high class' animal, a 'very good' animal, or what? None of the Bengali words for 'noble' I can think of seem right, but in the end I shall probably resort to downright cheating. So I cannot really blame the teacher if in the end he resorts to a dodge.

The result is that the boy learns nothing. Had he been

learning no other language than Bengali, he would at least have been able to read and appreciate the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Had he not been sent to school at all, he would have had all the time in the world to play games, climb trees, swim in rivers and ponds, pluck flowers, and do a thousand damages to fields and woods. He would thus have fully gratified his youthful nature and developed a cheerful mind and a healthy body. But as he struggles with his English, neither does he learn it, nor does he enjoy himself; neither does he acquire the ability to enter the imaginary world of literature, nor does he get the time to step into the real world of nature.

Man belongs to two worlds, one of which lies within him and the other outside. They give him life, health and strength and keep him ever-flowering by ceaselessly breaking upon him in waves of form, colour and smell, movement and music, and love and joy. Our children are banished from both these worlds, as from two native lands, and are kept chained in a foreign prison. God has filled the hearts of parents with love so that children can have their fill of it, and He has made the breasts of mothers soft so that children can rest on them. Children have small bodies, but all the empty spaces of the house do not give them enough room to play. And where do we make our sons and daughters spend their childhood? Among the grammars and lexicons of a foreign language; and within the narrow confines of a schoolwork which is dull and cheerless, stale and unending.

A man's years are like links in a chain, and it will be somewhat superfluous to state anew the well-known fact that childhood grows into manhood by degrees. Certain mental qualities are indispensable to a grown-up man who has just entered the world of action. But these qualities are

not instantly available ; they have to be developed. Like our hands and feet our mental qualities grow at every stage of our life in answer to the call that is made on them. They are not like ready-made articles which can be bought in shops whenever needed.

The power of thought and the power of imagination are indispensable to us for discharging the duties of life. We cannot do without those two powers if we want to live like real men. And unless we cultivate them in childhood we cannot have them when we are grown up.

Our present system of education, however, does not allow us to cultivate them. We have to spend many years of our childhood in learning a foreign language taught by men not qualified for the job. To learn the English language is difficult enough, but to familiarize ourselves with English thought and feeling is even more difficult, and takes a long time during which our thinking capacity remains inactive for lack of an outlet.

To read without thinking is like accumulating building materials without building anything. After we have accumulated a mountainous pile of mortar, lime and sand, and of bricks, beams and rafters, we suddenly get an order from the University to do the roof of a three-storyed house. So we instantly climb to the top of our pile and beat it down incessantly for two years, until it becomes level and somewhat resembles the flat roof of a house. But could this pile be called a house? Has it windows to let in air and light? Could a man make it his home for the whole of his life? Has it order, beauty, harmony?

There is no doubt that a great deal of material is now collected in our country for building the edifice of the mind, much greater than at any other time in its history. But we must not make the mistake of thinking that by

learning to collect we have learnt to build. Good results follow only when accumulation and building are carried on, step by step, at the same time.

It follows, therefore, that if I want my son to grow up into a man, I should see that he grows up like a man right from his childhood. Otherwise he will always remain a child. He should be told not to rely entirely on memory, and be given plenty of opportunity to think for himself and use his imagination. To get a good crop it is necessary to water the field besides ploughing it and harrowing it, and rice in particular grows best on well-watered earth. Rain is essential to rice at a particular moment in its cultivation, and the crop will be ruined if there is no rain when it is needed most. When the moment is gone, even a lot of rain will not save the crop. Childhood and adolescence are the moments when the stimulus of literature is essential to the growth of a man. Quickened by that stimulus, the tender shoots of his mind and heart will come forth in the air and light, and continue to grow in health and strength. But they will remain undeveloped if the moment is wasted in studying dry and dusty grammars and lexicons. Even if the most vital truths, wonderful conceptions, and sublime thoughts of European literature are showered on the man for the rest of his life, he will never imbibe its inmost spirit.

In our lives that auspicious moment is wasted in joyless education. From childhood to adolescence, and again from adolescence to manhood, we are coolies of the goddess of learning, carrying loads of words on our folded backs. When at last we manage to enter the realm of English ideas, we find that we are not quite at home there. We find that although we can somehow understand those ideas, we cannot absorb them into our deepest nature ; that although

we can use them in our lectures and writings, we cannot use them in the practical affairs of our lives.

So the first twenty or twenty-two years of our lives are spent in picking up ideas from English books. But at no time are those ideas chemically fused with our lives. The result is that our minds present a most bizarre look, some of those ideas sticking to them like pieces of gummed paper while others have been rubbed off in course of time. After smearing ourselves with a European learning which has no connection with our inner lives, we strut about as proudly as those savages who ruin the natural brightness and loveliness of their skin by painting and tattooing it. Savage chiefs do not realize how ridiculous they look when they put on European clothes and decorate themselves with cheap European glass beads. We too do not realize what unconscious figures of farce we become when we parade the cheap smartness of the English words we know, and ruin some of the greatest European ideas by completely misapplying them. If we see anyone laughing at us, we immediately try to justify ourselves by speaking even more impressively.

Since our education bears no relation to our life, the books we read paint no vivid pictures of our homes, extol no ideals of our society. The daily pursuits of our lives find no place in those pages, nor do we meet there anybody or anything we happily recognize as our friends and relatives, our sky and earth, our mornings and evenings, or our cornfields and rivers. Education and life can never become one in such circumstances, and are bound to remain separated by a barrier. Our education may be compared to rainfall on a spot that is a long way from our roots. Not enough moisture seeps through the intervening barrier of earth to quench our thirst.

The barrier that separates education from life is really impenetrable in this country, so that their union is hard to attain. A growing hostility between the two is most often the result. We begin to develop a fundamental dislike and distrust of what we learn at school and college, since we find it contradicted in every detail by the conditions of the life around us. We begin to think that we are learning untruths and that European civilization is wholly based on them ; that Indian civilization is wholly based on truth and our education is directing us to a land of enchanting falsehood. The real reason why European learning often fails us is not to be sought in any defect in that learning, but in the unfavourable conditions of our life. Yet we say that European learning fails us because failure is inherent in its nature. The stronger our dislike of this learning, the fewer the benefits it confers on us. And so the feud between our education and our life sharpens. As they draw further apart, our days become a stage where they mock and revile each other like two characters in a farce.

How to effect the union of education and life is today our most pressing problem. That union can be achieved only by Bengali language and literature. We all know that Bankimchandra Chatterji's periodical, *Bangadarshan*, appeared in the sky of Bengal like the dawn of a new day. Why was it that it gave the entire educated class such deep satisfaction? Did it publish any truth hitherto unknown to European history, philosophy or science? The answer is that *Bangadarshan* was the instrument with which a great genius broke down the barrier between our education and our life, and effected the joyous union of our head and heart. Until then, European culture had been an alien amongst us. As *Bangadarshan* brought it into our homes, we began to see ourselves in a new, revealing light. In the

figures of Suryamukhi and Kamalmani, *Bangadarshan* showed our women as they really are ; in the characters of Chandrasekhar and Pratap, it raised the ideal of Bengali manhood ; and it cast a ray of glory on the petty affairs of our day-to-day life.

The pleasure we derived from *Bangadarshan* has had the effect of making educated Bengalees of today eager to write in their mother-tongue. They have realized that English can serve only their business, and not literary, purposes ; and they have noticed that, in spite of the great care with which English is learnt in this country, the books that are likely to live a long time are all being written in Bengali. The main reason for this is that a Bengalee can never acquire so close and intimate a knowledge of English as to make it the medium of a spontaneous literary expression. Even if he were a master of the English language, he would not be able to make it a live instrument of Bengali thought and feeling. The uncommon beauties and memories that impel us to creative activity can never assume their true form in a foreign language. Nor can those inherited qualities, which through generations have cast our minds in a special mould.

I have already said that our childhood and adolescence are spent in learning a language without gaining access to the underlying thought. The situation is reversed when we are older ; we then lack a language with which to express our thoughts. I have also said that the reason why we are never on intimate terms with English literature is to be found in the dissociation of language and thought that takes place in us early in life. It is also the reason why many of our latter-day intellectuals feel dissatisfied with English literature. Turning to these intellectuals, we find that their thought is dissociated not only from English,

but from Bengali as well. They have in fact become strangers to Bengali and developed an aversion for it. They do not, of course, openly admit that they do not know it, and they cry it down as unsuitable for thoughtful work and unworthy of cultivated people like themselves. It is the story of sour grapes over again.

From whatever angle we consider the matter, we find that our life, our thought and our language are not harmonized. Because of this fundamental disunity, we cannot stand on our two feet, cannot get what we want, cannot succeed in our efforts. I once read a story of a poor man who wanted to buy himself winter clothes for winter and summer clothes for summer. So he used to save up all the money he could get by begging. But he could not save up enough to buy summer clothes until summer was gone. This went on year after year until God, moved by pity, told the man that He would grant him a wish. "All I ask for," the man said, "is this: let the vicissitudes of fortune end, so that I no longer get winter clothes in summer and summer clothes in winter."

We too pray that God would end the vicissitudes of our education, and grant us winter clothes in winter and summer clothes in summer. God has put before us everything we need, but we cannot help ourselves to the right thing at the right moment. And that is why we live like that beggar in the story. So let us pray to God to give us food when we are hungry, and clothes when we are cold. Let us pray that He would unite our language with our thought and our education with our life.

—1892

Society and State

In our country the king waged wars, defended his territory and dispensed justice, but society attended to all else, from the supply of water to the supply of knowledge. This was done with such great competence that the repeated floods of new sovereignty through the centuries could neither destroy our spiritual life and reduce us to brutes, nor break up our society and turn us into destitutes.

There was no end to warfare between kings ; but in the clearings of our bamboo groves and in the shade of our mango orchards temples and rest-houses were built, tanks excavated ; the village schoolmaster taught his simple arithmetic ; readings from the scriptures never ceased, the *Ramayana* was chanted in altar-sheds, and village meeting-places echoed to the melody of hymns to Krishna. Our rural society never depended on external help, nor was its richness of structure ever impaired by aggression from outside.

That, today, we should have to deplore the scarcity of water in our country, is of comparatively minor import. The main cause of that scarcity is our real regret—the fact that society has lost interest in itself and all its attention is directed outwards.

When a river flowing by a village changes its ancient course, the water supply and the crops, health and commerce get wrecked. Gardens turn into wilderness ; the ruins

of a past prosperity shelter the banyan and the peepul in the crevices of their crumbling foundations, and become a haunt for the owl and the bat.

The flow of the human mind is not of less importance than that of a river. This current of the mind had always worked to maintain the good health and happiness of the cool-shaded villages of Bengal ; but now the mind of Bengal is distracted. That is why her temples are falling to ruins for lack of men to repair them ; her tanks are insanitary for lack of men to clear the slime ; the mansions of the rich are shorn of joyous festivity and stand deserted. Now it is the government which must provide drinking water and good health ; and even for the gift of education we must kneel humbly at the portals of the authorities. The tree which once made its own flowers bloom now raises its withered limbs in an appeal to heaven for help. Even if that prayer is answered, what will such make-believe blossoms avail?

What in English concepts is known as the State was called in our country *Sarkar* or Government. This Government existed in ancient India in the form of kingly power, but there is a difference between the present English State and our ancient kingly power. England relegates to State care all the welfare services in the country ; India did that only to a very limited extent.

Not that the king did not have to support and reward those who gave the people free education, both secular and religious—but he did so only in part. The real responsibility lay on the householder. If the king withheld his grants or if all of a sudden there was anarchy, the secular and religious education of society could not be seriously interrupted. It was not as though the king did not have tanks dug but he did hardly more than any other wealthy

member of society. The reservoirs of the country did not run dry if the king alone was negligent.

In England the people are free to enjoy their comforts and pleasures and pursue their own interests ; they are not burdened with communal duties, since such cares rest with the State. In India it was the king who was comparatively free, and the people were tied to social obligations Whether the king went to war or a-hunting, whether he was true to his duties or passed his time simply in pursuit of pleasure, he was morally responsible for his own actions, but the people had never depended on him for their communal welfare. On the contrary, social duties were specifically assigned to the members of society.

Consequently, what we understand by the word *dharma* permeated the whole social fabric. Every man had to acquire the discipline of self-control ; every man had to accept the sanctified code of obligations.

The vital strength in different civilizations is variously embodied. The heart of a country lies wherever the people's welfare is centred. A blow aimed at that point is fatal for the whole country. In England the overthrow of the State might mean peril for the nation—that is why politics there is such a serious affair. In our country there would be danger only when the social body, *samaj*, became crippled. That is why we never cared to do our utmost for political liberty, while we have protected social liberty in every way. England relies on the State for everything, from the relief of the destitute to the religious education of the public ; whereas our country depends on the people's sense of duty. Therefore, England has to exist by keeping the State alive while we exist by preserving our social consciousness.

Naturally, England is always engaged in keeping the

State wakeful and active. And we, having read in English schools, have come to the conclusion that it is the main duty of the general public to prick the government into attentiveness in all circumstances. We have somehow lost sight of the fact that we cannot cure our own ills by applying poultices on another person's body.

An argument may arise at this point—whether it is better for public duties to lie in the body public, or to be vested in a particular organ named the Government. I wish to stress the fact that such a discussion would suit a debating club but would be useless to us at present. We have to understand that the British State is unshakably founded on the goodwill of the people and it has evolved by a natural process. We cannot attain that condition by argument alone ; and however excellent, it happens anyway to be beyond our reach today.

The government in our country has no relationship with our society and no place in the social organization, so that, whatever we may seek from it must be bought at the expense of a certain freedom. Society must make itself ineffective with regard to the duties it relegates to the government. This is not natural to us. We have accepted the bonds of subjection under many races and many kings, but our society has always carried out its own duties, never permitting anyone from outside to intervene in its affairs, great or small. So, when Majesty was banished from the land, Social Grace yet remained.

Today, of our own accord, we are ready to hand over to the government, one by one, the duties which had belonged to society. Many new communities appeared in our samaj in course of time and made special rules and conventions for themselves, while remaining within the Hindu fold ; Hindu society never found fault with them.

But everything is now tied down to the rigidity of the Englishmen's law and any departure whatever is compelled to declare itself non-Hindu. The innermost core of our samaj, which we have guarded through the ages with the deepest concern, is exposed at last to outside aggression and the result is confusion. That is where the danger lies, and not in the scarcity of water supply.

II

In the years gone by, men who were held in great esteem at the court of the king and whose counsel was sought by the ruler did not find that satisfaction enough. It was the approbation of their own samaj that they valued more. Humbly they waited at the cottage doors of their nameless villages for that reward which even Delhi, the imperial capital, could not give. A tribute from the masses of the people meant more than the highest title bestowed by the king.

Since we no longer care for that kind of honour, our enterprises have ceased to be directed towards our countrymen. Blessings and alms from the ruler are now indispensable. To remove the want of water it is the ruler who must provide the urge. We have signed off our spirit in bondage to the British, even as we have bargained away our good taste in English shops.

I feel I may be misunderstood. I do not mean that each one of us must cling to his native soil, that there is no need to stir outside the village in order to win knowledge, honour and riches. We cannot but be grateful to the forces which draw the people of Bengal abroad, awakening their hidden capacities and broadening their minds by the extension of their field of work. The time, however, has

come to remind our people that the natural relation between home and abroad must not be upset. One must go abroad to earn and come back with the savings. Though one's faculties may be engaged abroad, the heart must be centred at home. What we learn abroad we must apply at home. But then, we have simply reversed the positions of home and abroad, of kinsman and stranger.

The Provincial Conference is a good example of the resulting anomaly in our affairs. This Conference assembles in order to give a message to the country, but the language it uses is foreign. We seem to be concerned only with the English-educated. We have set up an impregnable barrier between the masses and ourselves.

Think how we must proceed if the Conference is to make a strong impression on the country. Instead of a meeting in the English way, we shall have a huge fair in the Indian way. A grand festival of folk-plays and songs will draw people from all over the land, prizes to be awarded to the best singers, dramatic groups and orators. The country's agricultural products will be exhibited and rules of hygiene graphically explained with the aid of such things as lantern slides. Above all, whatever we have to say on questions of national interest will be discussed in simple Bengali by the highborn and the humble alike.

The great masses of our people live in villages. When the village wants to feel the throb of the greater life of the outside world, the fair is the best way.

Through these fairs we shall have the outside world in our homes. In the midst of such festivities the village must forget its narrow conservatism, for these will be occasions to give and to receive. As in the rainy season tanks fill with water from heaven, so the fair is to be the

time when the village heart fills with thoughts of the great world.

These fairs are most natural to our country. When our people are called to a formal meeting, they come burdened with doubt and suspicion and do not readily open their hearts. But those who assemble at a fair come with hearts already open. Plough and hoe left behind, they are on holiday. That is the time to sit by the people; then is the opportunity to reach towards the soul of the country.

All over Bengal fairs are held at different times of the year. We must make a list of these fairs and get to know our countrymen through that open door.

If the educated classes make it their business to give the fairs in their own localities a new life and objective, if through those fairs they bring together the Hindu and the Muslim, and avoiding empty politics, ascertain the real needs of the people—schools, roads, water reservoirs, pasture-land and the like—then the country will indeed be filled with new stirrings.

Expense will be no worry for a band of workers who go round the districts of Bengal and organize songs, *kathak* (mythological stories) recitals, and exhibition of lantern slides. Paying the landlord a small part of the collections they can make their venture financially rewarding. The balance of profits, applied to national service, will build strong ties of friendship between these workers and the people. There is no limit to the service that may be rendered in this way. For it has to be remembered that our people have immemorially enjoyed literature and absorbed religion through the medium of festivities.

Of late our landlords have moved off to cities, for one reason or another. On the occasion of the marriage of their

sons and daughters, the festivities usually mean music, theatricals and other entertainments for their rich city friends, while the poor tenants' share is simply the payment of extra impositions. The poor provide the sweetmeats for the feast but may not taste a morsel. So the villages of Bengal get drained of joy; and that literary culture which used to be a special feature of all such occasions and refreshed the minds of man, woman and child alike, moves away beyond the reach of the masses. If our proposed series of fairs succeed in taking back to the village house-door a flow of literature and of joy, then the heart of this fruitful land will cease to turn barren by slow stages.

Reservoirs which once gave us drinking water and good health are now polluted, and not only do they cause water shortage but spread disease and death. Likewise, most of the fairs still held in our country have ceased to be a medium of popular education and are cess-pools of corruption. Failing to avert this foul decay we cover ourselves with guilt and shame.

III

To establish a personal relationship between man and man has been India's constant endeavour. One has to retain contact even with distant relatives; filial ties are not loosened even when children come of age; and our ties of kinship include neighbours and many others in the village irrespective of caste or circumstance. There are relationships with teacher and priest, guest and mendicant, landlord and tenant—not ties prescribed by the scriptures, but those of the heart. Someone is as a father, others as sons, some are as brothers and others friends. The moment

we come into contact with a person, we strike up a relationship with him. So we do not slip into the habit of looking on man as a machine, or as a tool for the furtherance of some interest. There may be a bad as well as a good side to this ; anyhow, it has been the way of our country ; more, it has been the way of the East.

Such is our nature. We accept relationships of utility only after we have sanctified them by a kinship of the heart. That is why we must also accept extra responsibilities. The ties of necessity are limited, they begin and end at the office. If master and servant have no other relationship, their contact ends with the exaction of tasks and the payment of wages ; but as soon as we acknowledge a human bond, our obligation extends to personal joys and sorrows—the marriage of a servant's son or daughter as also funeral rites.

Here is a more modern instance. I was present at the Provincial Conference in Rajshahi and Dacca. That we regard these conferences as serious business goes without saying, but what surprised me was that the ritual of hospitality was more conspicuous than the zeal for work. It was like a bridal party ; the demands for food and entertainment, comforts and pleasure were so excessive that they must have severely taxed our hosts.

There would have been nothing wrong if they had said, "You have come here to serve your country and not to oblige us. Why should we have to provide so much good food and soft drinks and accommodation and conveyance?" But it is not in our nature to take such a stand on the plea of stark duty. We like to invest even duties with a personal relationship. And so, at the conference, we were less impressed by the business done than by the hospitality received. Those conferences, with their westernized

exterior, could not cut away the Indian heart. So also with our National Congress. That aspect in the Congress which is truly national—its hospitality—has always been active, even though its work ends with a three-day annual session and it gives no sign of life for the rest of the year.

It is obvious that even in the midst of serious work Indians cannot be without human warmth. That explains the close relationship, throughout the country, between kinsman and stranger, high and low, householder and guest. That is why no outsider had ever to be concerned with the upkeep of the village school and guest-house, temple and tank, or the care of the helpless blind and sick.

It is natural for a country to centre all its interest at points where it derives the greatest benefit. We deplore the fact that the wealth of the land is being diverted abroad through various channels; but if the soul of the land is also diverted, if every beneficent contact with our country passes into the hands of the alien ruler and nothing is left to us, will it be less regrettable than the passage of our wealth abroad?

IV

Many enterprisers in the first outburst of enthusiasm make many flowers blossom forth, but in the end most of these do not bear fruit. That is due mainly to the absence of *esprit de corps*. A loose sense of responsibility slips off our shoulders and is lost.

Our society can no longer continue in this manner, since the forces from outside seeking to overwhelm it are united and powerful. They have taken possession of everything.

from our schools to our daily markets, and have made their undivided rule conspicuous in both concrete and abstract forms. If the community is to protect itself, it must take its stand on united strength. The best way would be to invest a strong personality with leadership and rally round him as our representative; to submit to his rule would mean no loss of self-respect, for he would be a symbol of freedom itself.

Such a leader of society may sometimes be good, sometimes evil, but if society is alive and alert, no leader can do any permanent harm. On the other hand, the initiation of such a leader is a practical way to keep society alert. If society recognizes its unity as symbolized in a particular person, it will become undefeatable.

Every member of society must put aside a small voluntary contribution for his country as a matter of daily habit. In addition, there could be contributions for this nationalist society on festive occasions, such as marriage, by way of a toll. If such dues are collected in the right way, there will be no dearth of funds.

In India voluntary contributions have founded rich monasteries and temples. Should it not then be possible for society to be maintained likewise, especially when, by its good works, it would be entitled to the gifts of the grateful?

So far I have had only Bengal in view. If we in Bengal succeed in selecting a leader of the samaj and making our social liberty bright and permanent, then the rest of India will follow. And if every Indian province finds within itself a distinctive unity, then it will be easy for each to co-operate with the rest. The rule of unity, once established, grows in extent but unity is not the heaping together of a mass of separate entities.

V

A few words on the subject will make it clear how imperative it is that we should concentrate and realize all our inherent powers at one point, and form a system by which they may thence be deployed. Either for convenience or for some other reason the Government want to partition Bengal and we fear that such a step will weaken the province. We have made enough lamentation in protest, but if we fail, will everything come to an end? Will there be no means left to remedy the evils likely to arise as a result of partition?

It is better that germs of disease should not enter the body, but if they do, will there be no power left in the body to check the disease and restore good health? If we can establish that authority in a firm and distinct manner in our society, then no external power will ever succeed in devitalizing Bengal. Its duty will be to heal every wound, strengthen the bonds of unity, and animate the unconscious.

Today a foreign king distributes titles among us as a reward for good deeds, but we shall truly be glorified only if we receive the benediction of our own countrymen. Unless we vest society with the power to give rewards, we shall deny ourselves a special satisfaction. In our country disputes arise between Hindus and Muslims at the slightest provocation; unless some element in society is given the authority to settle such disputes, regulate conflicting interests and establish peace and goodwill, society will be weakened by disruptions, more and more.

Do not distrust your own strength; know for certain that the great hour has come. Know for certain that a unifying power has always worked in India. Even in the

most adverse circumstance India has always worked her way out ; that is why India still survives. I believe in this India. Even today, at this very moment, this India is slowly and surely building up a wonderful consistency between her ancient traditions and the modern times. Let each of us do his share consciously ; let not mutinous feelings or sheer stupidity make us unco-operative at every turn.

The conflict between Hindu society and the outer world is not something new. As soon as the Aryans entered India, they became involved in a bitter struggle with the aboriginal inhabitants. In this conflict the Aryans were the victors, but the aborigines were not exterminated, like those in Australia or America. They were not banished from the Aryan colonies ; in spite of vast differences in custom and culture, they were assigned a definite place in the social hierarchy. Aryan society became richly variegated on their account.

Later, again, this society was called upon to shake off its conservatism. India in the Buddhist age was in intimate contact with many foreign peoples who were attracted by the new religion. The powers of unity are stronger than those of conflict ; in the moment of unity all are at one. That is what happened in the Buddhist age. In that Asia-wide flood of religious feeling, the customs, traditions and institutions of many nations flowed into India, and there was none to stay them.

But even in the midst of this vast chaos, India's genius for synthesis did not forsake her. Once more India put together whatever was her own and whatever came from guests, and started to reconstruct her society. So it became richer than of old.

Everywhere over this wide assortment she put the seal

of her own unity. Today many people ask: "Where is this so-called unity in the self-contradictory, schismatic Hindu society and religion?" That is a difficult question. It is just as difficult to discover the centre of a vast circle, but there is always a centre. It is easy to realize the roundness of a small sphere; but to those who regard the spherical earth in sections, it appears flat. In the same way since Hindu society has embodied inconsistent varieties within itself, its bond of union is hidden deep in its structure. It is hard to point out that unity, but we can feel its definite presence clearly in the midst of apparent discrepancies.

Later, India had to face Muslim invasions. A process of reconciliation with the external, warring elements began almost immediately. Between Muslim and Hindu a common ground was being extended where the boundary lines between the two communities grew fainter and fainter. The followers of Nanak and Kabir and the lower order of Vaisnavas are cases in point.

Our educated classes keep no track of the thousand breakdowns and building up of customs and religious observances among the common people. Had they done so, they would have noticed that even today this secret but active process of adjustment and accommodation has not ceased to work.

Finally, in recent years, yet another powerful religion with its own beliefs, customs, traditions and educational methods has come to India. So, all the four great communities of the world, under the aegis of the four great religions, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian, are here together. It is as though Providence has opened a vast laboratory on Indian soil for the purpose of a massive social fusion.

Here I must admit that the confusions and upheavals which characterized the Buddhist age left behind them, in the succeeding Hindu society, a residue of fear. An attitude of deep suspicion towards innovation and change began to prevail. Under such conditions of constant panic, society can make no progress, and it fails to resist challenges from outside. A community which exhausts all its strength in self-defence cannot attain easy mobility. Certain dynamic qualities must be retained along with the static, or else society would be entrapped in its own conservatism and be doomed to a living death.

Post-Buddhist Hindu society built a barrier of prohibitory measures in order to shield itself from external influences and preserve whatever of its own was still left, and India's place of glory was lost to her in consequence.

VI

At one time India had a place on top of the world ; there was no limit to her spiritual daring in the fields of religion, philosophy and science and her forces spread far, annexing new domains. The preceptor's seat which India had thus won is now lost ; now she must stand as a disciple. The reason is that fear has entered into her soul.

Panic made us forbid voyaging on the high seas—whether of water or of knowledge. We belonged to the universe but relegated ourselves to the parish. The timid feminine forces of society which hoard and protect have foiled our manly adventure. Even in the field of knowledge we are convention-bound, emasculated. Whatever intellectual commerce India had opened, a commerce which grew from day to day and enriched the world, is now enclosed

in jewel caskets in ladies' chambers. It may be secure enough there, but then it will never increase ; and whatever is lost is lost indeed.

We have lost the status of teacher. Kingship was never our country's greatest wealth ; it never occupied the people's hearts and its absence is not fatal. In the authority of Brahminism, of learning, *dharma* and asceticism, the true soul of the country was enthroned. Since mere ritual replaced asceticism, since the Brahmin whose duty it was to enrich society with his austerities gave up his assigned role and descended to the gateway of society to take up the watchman's post, we stopped contributing to the world and have even distorted and rendered useless whatever had been our own.

This we must know that every nation is part of humanity and each must answer the question: "What have you to give to man, what new ways have you discovered for his happiness?" As soon as a nation loses the vital strength for such discovery, it becomes a deadweight, like a paralyzed limb on the body of the universal man. Merely to exist is no glory.

India has never coveted new territory or scrambled for the spoils of trade. China, Japan and Tibet, who are today so anxious to close their doors and windows against the advances of Europe, cordially welcomed India into their homes as a spiritual guide.

India has never sent out her forces for plunder and pillage, but only to carry messages of peace and goodwill. The glory she won was the fruit of asceticism and that is greater than the majesty of kingship.

Stripped of that glory, we huddled in our corner with our petty belongings—and then the British had to come. At their onslaught the defensive barrier we had so carefully

erected around our cringing, fugitive community gave way at many points, and through the gaps the outside world we had dreaded and kept at bay came hurtling in. And who will thrust it back? As our walls crumbled we discovered two things: we realized what wonderful powers we had once possessed; and having lost them how miserably weak we had become.

And today we understand also that to hide oneself at a distance is not self-preservation. The truest way of protecting oneself is to rouse one's inherent powers. Britain is bound to hold our souls in subjection until we forsake our inertness. To sit in a corner and bewail our losses will bear no fruit. To imitate the British and try to save ourselves by adopting a disguise is mere self-deception. We can never be real Englishmen, and we can never trick them by turning into imitation Englishmen.

The only way to stop this cheapening of our intelligence, feelings and tastes is to become our true selves, consciously, actively and with our full strength.

The forces that lie locked within us must find release under the stress of foreign onslaught, for today the world stands sorely in need of the priceless gifts which the ancient *rishis* of India earned by their self-discipline. Providence will not let those gifts go to waste. That is why, in the fulness of time, He has roused us by this agony of suffering.

VII

The inmost creed of India is to find the one in the many, unity in diversity. India does not admit difference to be conflict, nor does she espy an enemy in every stranger. So she repels none, destroys none, and strives to find a place

for all in a vast social order. She acknowledges every path and recognizes greatness wherever she finds it.

Since India has this genius for unification, we do not have to fear imaginary enemies. We may look forward to our own expansion as the final result of each new struggle. Hindu and Buddhist, Muslim and Christian shall not die fighting on Indian soil ; here they will find harmony. That harmony will not be non-Hindu ; on the contrary, it will be peculiarly Hinduistic. And however cosmopolitan the several limbs may be, the heart will still be the heart of India.

Let us bear in mind this providential injunction, and our purpose will be steadfast, our shame will be absolved and we shall discover India's true and deathless strength. We must remember that we shall not always have to receive the learning of Europe as mere students. Saraswati, India's Goddess of Knowledge, will make every art and science bloom for us like a hundred-petalled lotus.

—*1904*

Wealth is the burden of bigness,
Welfare the fullness of being.
Rabindranath Tagore

The Problem of Education

WHAT WE now call a school in this country is really a factory, and the teachers are part of it. At half past ten in the morning the factory opens with the ringing of a bell ; then, as the teachers start talking, the machines start working. The teachers stop talking at four in the afternoon when the factory closes, and the pupils then go home carrying with them a few pages of machine-made learning. Later, this learning is tested at examinations and labelled.

One advantage of a factory is that it can make goods exactly to order. Moreover, the goods are easy to label, because there is not much difference between what the different machines turn out.

But there is a good deal of difference between one man and another, and even between what the same man is on different days.

Moreover, we can never get from machines what we can get from human beings. A machine can hold a thing before us, but cannot give it to us. It can give us the oil with which to light a lamp, but it cannot light the lamp.

The school plays a minor part in the mental development of a European boy ; the major part is played by the life of the country in which he grows up. Far from being

divorced from life, European education is an integral part of it. It grows, develops and circulates in society, and leaves its imprint on what people say, think and do in their everyday life. The school is only a medium of the culture which society has acquired through its long history and the manifold activities of many people.

But the schools in our country, far from being integrated to society, are imposed on it from outside. The courses they teach are dull and dry, painful to learn, and useless when learnt. There is nothing in common between the lessons the pupils cram up from ten to four o'clock and the country where they live ; no agreement, but many disagreements, between what they learn at school and what their parents and relatives talk about at home. The schools are little better than factories for turning out robots.

It is clear, therefore, that although we might succeed in copying to perfection the externals of the European school, we shall never get the real thing. We shall only be burdening ourselves with tables and benches, rules and curricula, which are but imitations, however exact, of those in European schools.

Education in ancient India was in the charge of *gurus* who were moral and spiritual preceptors, and of teachers who were men rather than machines. It did not range over too wide a course, and was not in disagreement with the prevalent ideas and opinions of society. But to try to bring it back will mean useless revival of forms which will become a burden in the end.

If we at all understand the needs of the present day, we must see that any new schools founded by us fulfil the following conditions: that their courses are both lively and varied, and nourish the heart as well as the intellect ; that no disunity or discord disrupts the minds of our

young; and that education does not become something unreal, heavy and abstract with which the pupils are concerned only for those few hours when they are at school.

Boarding schools will be the result if we try to convert schools into homes. Boarding schools conjure up visions which are far from pleasant, and they are akin to army barracks, lunatic asylums, hospitals and prisons.

We must put the European model entirely out of our minds, if only for the reason that European history and European society are different from our history and our society. We must try properly to understand the ideals by which our country has been attracted and stimulated in the past.

This will present many difficulties. Because we have received English education, English models usurp the whole field of our vision and obscure the achievements of our own country. Even in our keenest struggles for freedom from British rule we remain fettered to Britain in so far as we seek no political models other than the British.

One of our difficulties arises from the fact that, lacking knowledge of Britain, we are unable to put English education in its proper prespective. Never having seen it in relation to the society to which it belongs, we fail to find the way by which its Indian counterpart can be harmonized with Indian life. Yet this is the most important question. To discuss such questions as the text-books that are studied, and the rules that are observed in some English school or college, is waste of time.

The idea seems to be bred in our bones that we can achieve anything by the mere act of founding an association and setting up a committee. In this respect we resemble the Tibetans who believe that they can acquire merit in heaven by hiring a lama to turn a prayer wheel

on their behalf. After having founded a science association long ago, we have been lamenting for years on end that our country is not interested in science. As if to establish a science association is the same thing as making a people interested in science. To think that a country will produce thousands of scientists as soon as a science association has been founded shows how addicted to machine worship we are in the present age.

The main thing is to get people interested. When that is done, our effort will be fully rewarded. How is it that ancient Indians were fully interested in the education they received? This is a question to be seriously considered. I know that some people study the calendars of foreign universities so assiduously as to give the impression of enjoying them immensely. I do not wish to spoil their enjoyment. It is certainly important to think about the subjects that should be taught in our schools ; but the question how to get the pupils fully interested in their work is just as important.

The gurus of ancient India, so tradition says, lived in hermitages. We cannot form a clear picture of what they really were. But one thing is certain, and it is that the guru was a family man and his pupils lived with him as members of his household. The idea that a teacher and his pupils should live together has come down to the present day and is sometimes found in our *tols* and *chatuspathis,* schools and colleges that provide orthodox Hindu learning.

A glance at these tols and chatuspathis would also show that they do not regard book-learning as the most important part of education. They are surrounded by an atmosphere of culture, and the teachers are dedicated to their vocation. They live a simple life, without any material

interest or luxury to distract their minds, and with plenty of time and opportunity for absorbing into their nature the things they learn. I would like to mention that this idea is also found in the great seats of learning in Europe.

In ancient India it was considered essential that the pupil should live at his teacher's home and that he should practise *brahmacharya*.

Brahmacharya should not be narrowly interpreted as austerity. A boy brought up in society is distracted by the impact of many people and many affairs, and his natural development is impeded. His feelings, while they are still in a formative stage, are aroused by false stimuli. Much waste of physical and mental power then follows. Young nature must be insulated from everything that might pervert it, and the object of brahmacharya is to protect growing manhood by disciplining it against the premature awakening of desire and its unhealthy gratification.

As a matter of fact, boys are happy to live in the discipline of nature. The discipline helps them to develop fully and taste the pleasure of real freedom, and it makes their bodies glow with the vigour of their sprouting minds.

Moral instruction has now displaced brahmacharya in our schools, and guardians want it to be given on every conceivable pretext. But it is a mechanical affair, like daily doses of sarsaparilla to an invalid, or prescribed diet for building up bonny babies, and it presents many difficulties. It cannot possibly be made attractive to a boy ; it either hurts him or goes over his head, and it makes him feel like a criminal in the dock. I consider moral instruction utter waste of time and effort, and I am frightened that good people should be so keen on it. It is as futile as it is disagreeable, and I cannot think of anything that does more harm to society.

In a world where our standards are being daily pulled down by lies and distortions, it is too much tc hope that everything will be put right by parroting a few copy-book maxims between the hours of ten and four at school. Pi jaws breed an awful lot of pretension and presumption, and destroy the freshness and naturalness of young minds.

Brahmacharya gives power instead of mere instruction, and considers morality to be the essential ingredient, rather than the superficial ornament, of life. The person who practises it, far from regarding religion as something alien, takes to it easily and naturally as to a friend, and holds it close to his heart. It is not moral instruction that is needed for building up a boy's mind and character, but friendly guidance and congenial environment.

Besides practising brahmacharya a boy should live in the midst of nature. Towns are not our natural abodes, and have been built to supply our material needs. That we should be born in towns and be brought up in the lap of stone and brick was never intended by Providence. Towns snatch us away from the bosom of nature and consume us in their hungry furnace. People who live in them, and are absorbed by work, hardly feel that anything is missing from their lives, even though they have already strayed from nature and are daily getting further and further away from the great universe.

But nature's help is indispensable when we are still growing up, and still learning, and before we are drawn neck and crop into the whirlpool of affairs. Trees and rivers, and blue skies and beautiful views are just as necessary as benches and blackboards, books and examinations.

From ancient times the Indian mind has developed through close and unbroken contact with nature, and the

desire to be one with animal and vegetable life has been inherent in the Indian spirit. The young hermits of ancient India used to chant:

To the God who resides in fire and water,
in trees and plants,
Immanent in the world and the universe,
We bow, we bow.

The four elements of earth, water, air and fire form a whole and are instinct with the universal soul—this knowledge cannot be gained at a school in town. A school in town is a factory which can only teach us to regard the world as a machine.

Practical people will dismiss an idea of this kind as mysticism or mystification. But even they will not be able to deny that blue sky and air, trees and flowers, are indispensable for the proper growth of the body and mind of a boy. We cannot be in close contact with nature when we have grown up into busy men of affairs working in an office in a crowded town. So, it is all the more necessary for us to be under nature's influence when we are young, our minds fresh and eager to learn, and our senses vigorous. We can grow into full manhood only if we have been nursed by earth and water, sky and air, and nourished by them as by our mother's breasts. So let the children play under the open sky which is the playground of sunlight and clouds. Let them not be taken away from *Bhuma,* the Supreme Spirit. Let them see the sun unlock the day with bright fingers, and the tranquil glow of evening merge into the star-studded darkness of night. Let them see the six-act musical show nature puts on through the six seasons of the year. Let them hear the roar of thunder and

see the massed clouds darken the woods before bursting into rain. When the rains are over, let the children see the green and dewy fields waving in the wind and overflowing with corn as far as the horizon.

Freedom is essential to the mind in the period of growth, and it is richly provided by nature. It is impossible for a boy to develop in a healthy way if he has to rush through a meal between the hours of half past nine and ten in the morning in order to present himself at roll-call at school like a suspicious character reporting himself at a police station. How we make the young suffer by walling education in, and shutting it up behind gates guarded by a porter! Are children to be blamed for not having learnt problems of algebra and dates of history before coming into this world? And is that any reason for depriving them of air and light, of freedom and joy, and turning their education into a punishment in every detail? Children are born ignorant in order that they may have the joy of growing into knowledge by degrees. We may be too incompetent to make education a thing of joy, but we need not be so cruel as to turn schools into prisons. God intended children to be educated in the freedom of nature, and we defeat ourselves by defeating his intention. So for pity's sake let us break down the prison walls. Let children be no longer sentenced to imprisonment with hard labour because they did not become *pundits* before being born.

My view is that we should follow the ancient Indian principles of education. Students and teachers should live together and in natural surroundings, and the students should complete their education by practising brahmacharya. Founded on the eternal truths of human nature, these principles have lost nothing of their significance,

however much our circumstances might have altered through the ages.

If we had to build a school that would serve as a model, we should see that it was situated in a quiet spot far from the crowded city, and had the natural advantages of open sky, fields, trees and the like. It should be a retreat where teachers and students would live dedicated to learning.

If possible, there should be a plot of land which the students would help in cultivating, and which would provide food for the school. There should be cows for milk, and the students have a hand in tending them. When they are not engaged in study, the students should work in the garden, loosening the soil around the roots of trees, watering plants and training hedges. Their contact with nature would thus be both manual and mental.

In favourable weather the classes should be held in the shade of big trees. Part of the teaching should be in the form of discussion between teacher and student while they are walking between the rows of trees. In the evening recess the students should read the stars, cultivate music, and listen to legendary and historical tales.

A student who has done wrong should expiate for it in the ancient Indian manner. Punishment is the revenge of the wronged on the wrong-doer, but expiation is voluntarily undertaken by the wrong-doer himself. We should all learn early in life that expiation is a duty we owe to ourselves, and is the only way in which a wrong can be fully redressed. It is humiliating for a man to be punished by another man.

There is something else to be said in this connection. I see no reason why we must have tables, chairs and benches in our model school, and I hope I shall not be suspected of saying this out of prejudice against European ways.

What I have in mind is the principle of dispensing with everything that is inessential, and I would like to see it upheld in every possible way in our school. Not all of us can afford to have tables, chairs and benches, but the ground is always there for all to sit on. Chairs and benches deprive us of the use of the ground. Ours is not a cold country and our clothes are not unsuitable for sitting on the ground, and yet we are so keen on aping foreign ways that we create furniture that is utterly superfluous. The more we regard as indispensable the things that are really useless, the more shall we be wasting our energy.

Our country has not got the resources of wealthy Europe, and things that are cheap to Europeans are very dear to us. When making plans for some work of public welfare that we have undertaken, we concentrate on the preliminaries, such as house and furniture, and we get many headaches over what they will cost, although they are mostly superfluous. Why do we not have the courage to say that we shall start work in a mud hut, and sit down on the floor when holding our meetings? That would cut our labour by a half without impairing the quality of our work. As things stand, we feel ashamed and dissatisfied unless we make ambitious plans on the model of European countries which have unlimited resources and are overflowing with wealth, with the result that we use up our meagre resources in providing the preliminaries, and have very little left over for the work in hand.

Our country had no lack of schools when a piece of chalk and the bare floor were all that a boy needed to learn to write ; now it has a glut of slates and pencils but few schools. The tendency to care more for inessentials than for essentials is now seen in every aspect of our life. Our ancestors cared little for social formalities and much for

social duties, but we do the opposite. They regarded furniture as part of wealth, but not of civilization. The guardians of civilization had very little furniture in their homes in those days, and they gave the country contentment by making poverty respectable. If we could be imbued with the ideal of plain living while we are young, we could at least acquire a few powers, if nothing else: the powers of sitting on the ground, putting on plain clothes, eating plain food, and of getting the best possible result with the least possible effort. These are not small powers, and they need a lot of effort to acquire.

Simplicity, naturalness and ease are the marks of the civilized, and excess and ostentation of the barbarian. Real greatness shines with its own native lustre, and loses nothing in humble surroundings. This is the simple truth, but it must be brought home to our boys in every possible way and instilled into their nature. They must learn it, not as a moral precept that can do them no good, but through the vivid example of plain living that they will see everywhere in their school. If they do not learn it, they will form a dislike of manual work, and think it demeaning to sit on the floor. Worse still, they will despise their forefathers and misunderstand the message of ancient India.

Assuming that we shall dispense with all externals, however glamorous, and concentrate wholly on inner worth, the question now arises whether the resources at our command will be adequate to our purpose. Our first duty as founders of a school should be to see that the teaching is in the charge of gurus. But how to get them? Gurus cannot be made to order, nor can we get them, as we can get schoolmasters, by advertising for them.

On this question I admit that we must cut the coat according to the cloth. It would be sheer folly to imagine that,

because we needed a guru very badly, we would get a Yajnavalkya. But we should also remember that under existing conditions a considerable part of our country's talent remains idle, like uninvested capital, because no attempt is made to turn it to full account. By using a large pail of water for sticking postage stamps on envelopes we leave most of the water unutilized, but we use it all up if we have it for a bath. This shows that the value of the pail of water increases or decreases according to use. The duties performed by a schoolmaster today do not call for more than a very small part of his mind and spirit and they can be performed almost as well by a gramophone with a bit of brain and a cane tied to it. But the same schoolmaster will devote his whole mind and spirit to the service of his students if he is called upon to undertake the duties of a guru. True, he will not be able to give beyond his capacity, but he will also be ashamed to give less. It takes two to make a bargain, and we must ask for the best if we want to get it. Only a small part of our country's mental and spiritual powers is now in operation in the form of schoolmasters, but a much larger part will come into action in the form of gurus if our country earnestly desires it.

Economic forces compel the teacher of today to look for pupils, but in the natural order of things it is the pupils who should look for the teacher. The teacher is now a tradesman, a vendor of education in search of customers, and no one expects to find affection, regard, devotion or any other feeling in the list of goods he has for sale. After he has sold his goods, paid for in the form of a salary, he has no more to do with his pupils. But in spite of the unfavourable conditions of today, our country still possesses a few teachers who are able to rise above financial con-

siderations by virtue of their inner worth, and it is one of these teachers who should be elevated to the position of the guru. Such a teacher will not fail to appreciate, when he is a guru, that he will do himself credit only if he can put life into his pupils with his own life, light their lamps with his own learning, and make them happy with his affection. By giving his pupils things that cannot be bought and sold and are really beyond all price, he will earn from them a devotion that owes nothing to the fear of being punished, and is deep enough to be called religious and genuine enough to be called natural. Although he will be obliged to take a salary for the sake of a livelihood, he will lend distinction to his position by giving much more than he is paid for.

Discussion of such details may seem useless to many of my readers who disagree with me on fundamentals, e.g., on the question whether it is good for boys to be sent away from home to be educated.

On this question I should say first that to give a boy what is now commonly regarded as education, our parents see no need to do anything more than send him to the nearest school and maybe, engage a private tutor. That sort of 'education' aims solely at helping a boy to grow into a moneymaker and, as I have already pointed out, it is unworthy of its name.

The world consists of people of different occupations, who live in homes varying in character and atmosphere and have children growing up with distinctive traits right from their infancy. Due to their occupations adults must attain different characteristics and fall into separate groups ; it is not good for a boy, however, to be cast in the mould of his parents on the threshold of life.

Let us take the rich man's son as an example. He does

not bring with him anything special when he comes into the world, anything that differentiates him from the son of the poor. It is the way he is brought up that gives him the marks of the rich.

So it is the duty of his parents first to build up his common humanity. Only after that has been done, and only to the extent that is compulsive, should they allow him to develop as a rich man's son. What actually happens is just the opposite. The boy is taught to act and behave like a rich man's son before he has fully learnt to act and behave like a human child ; with the result that he is debarred from many of the fruitful experiences of childhood, and grows up with a rather limited range of feeling. For one thing, he is turned into a cripple, although he has hands and feet, by parents who themselves live like caged and pinioned birds. He must not walk, and must have a carriage. He must not carry the lightest load, and must have a porter. He must not do anything for himself, and must have a servant. Although healthy in every limb, he must behave like a paralytic. And he must do all this, not because he has any physical infirmities, but for fear of what people would think if he did not. The easiest things become difficult to him in consequence, the most natural things appear shameful. In deference to their social circle his parents shackle him with so many worthless conventions as to deprive him of almost all his natural rights as a human being. Should we say that such parents, who sow the cornfields of the earth with weeds, are the best people to be in charge of children?

It is not possible to forbid adults the luxury of snobbery, but children, if we understand what they really like, must not be forced into that kind of perversion. Children love the earth with its dust and its dirt, and they love the

sun, the wind and the rain. They do not like to be dressed up, they enjoy themselves most when they are discovering the world with their senses, and they are not a bit ashamed to be their natural selves.

Many of our boys and girls are now being brought up in the way Europeans live in this country. They have nannies to look after them ; they learn perverted Hindi and forget Bengali. They have been severed from the umbilical cord by which all children should remain tied to their native land and derive sustenance from it. Nor have they any access to European society. They have been uprooted from a forest and transplanted to a European flower-box. A grown-up Bengali is of course free to adopt European ways if he likes to do so, but why should Bengali parents go to such lengths in bringing up their children in the European way? I once heard a westernized boy cry out to his mother at the sight of some relatives of his who were dressed in the Indian style, "Mamma, Mamma, look —a lot of babus are coming." I can hardly imagine a worse degradation. Such youngsters, when they grow up, will be unfit for Bengali society and unacceptable to European society, and doomed to live as social outcasts.

In point of fact, those parents had no idea that they were bringing up their son in the wrong way ; since people are blind to their own defects, they fail to see the harm they do to others. That is why they are unwilling to send their children away from home to be educated, even when the homes are hotbeds of evil passions, prejudices and superstitions. It must be laid down that parents who want their boys to become real men should consider it their duty to send them to schools where they would live with gurus in close communion with nature and under the discipline of brahmacharya.

Embryos and seeds grow in the seclusion of the womb and of the under-earth, drawing nourishment from their surroundings all day and night, until they are strong enough to come out in the air and the light. Nature keeps them in a congenial environment, taking care that they are not disturbed by forces from outside.

The human mind is in the embryo stage in childhood and schoolboys should live in surroundings which protect them from all disturbing forces. To acquire strength by absorbing knowledge both consciously and unconsciously should be their sole aim, and their environment should be adapted to this purpose.

—1906

The worm thinks it foolish
that man does not eat his books.
Rabindranath Tagore