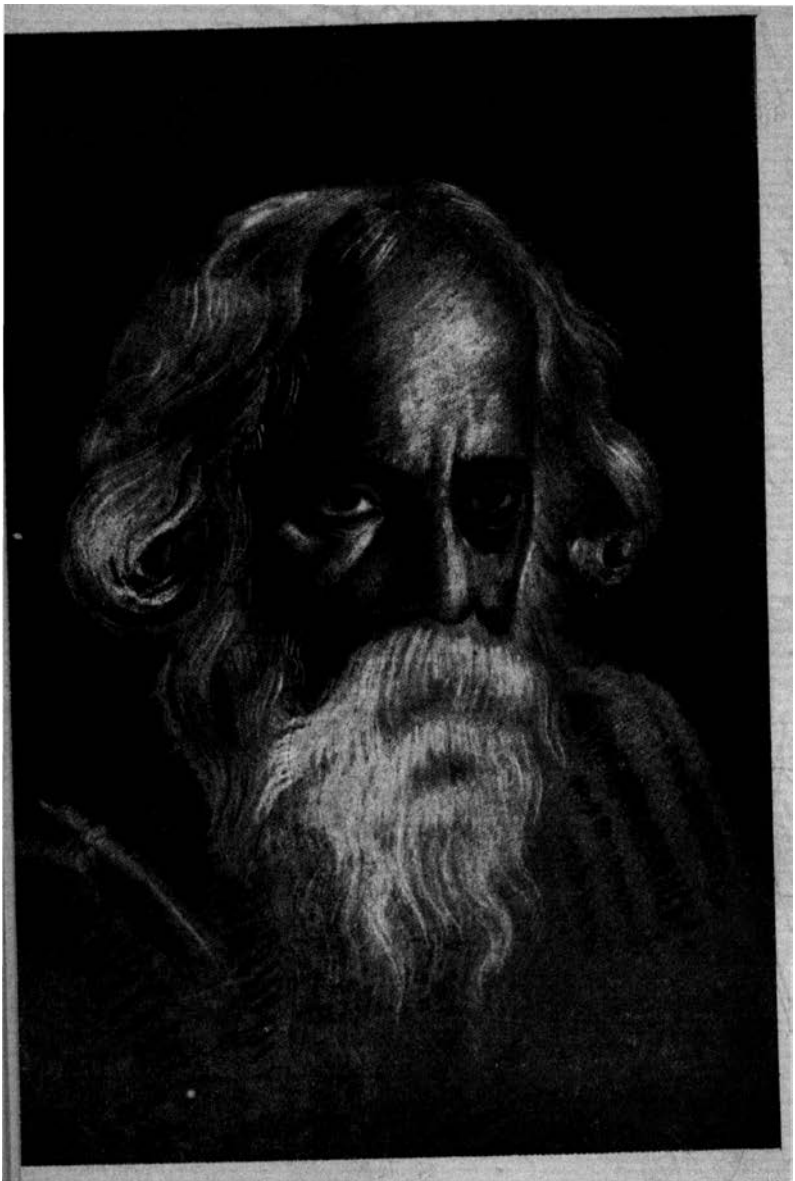
TAGORE

THE PROPHET OF PEACE



ΓEL DRAWING

By Roshan Lal

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by

R. I. PAUL

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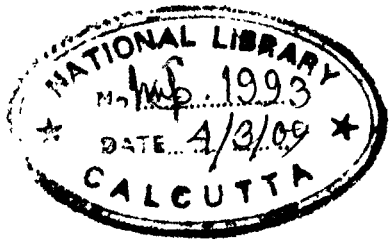

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I

IN SEARCH OF PEACE

What can be greater than to be a poet like Tagore? Philosophers have lived and died, their schools of philosophy have grown up and been forgotten. Kings have lived and died and who remembers then their names and dynasties they founded? Great generals have achieved glory and been forgotten. But the poet lives for ever, he lives in the hearts of today, he lives in the hearts of tomorrow and a poet like Tagore who loved his country was none the less a lover of all countries, even in every fibre of his being, in every silvery hair of his head, in every rich red drop of his blood.

—*SAROJINI NAIDU*

THE Victorian Age was the age of peace. Sandwiched between the stormy times that preceded and the still stormier decades that followed, it may be looked upon as the Golden Age of the present civilisation.

Let us go back to the early period of the nineteenth century when the history of the Bengal Renaissance was in the making. The sixteenth century is particularly known for the revival of art and letters under the influence of classical models in the Western Europe. The course adopted by the Bengal Renaissance Movement in the nineteenth century was surprisingly similar to that of Europe in the sixteenth century.

Of course, similar efforts conclude in a similar manner and similar actions have similar reactions. The history of mankind has preserved thousands of such instances that go a long way to bear testimony to this fact. The history of the Ancient India is dyed red with the blood of the Drivadians, so ruthlessly shed by the Aryans. The other chapter of the history opens with the murder and massacre of the Aryans, the tyrants, by the foreigners. The Brahmins punished

the Sudras with hot melted lead in their ears; the Brahmins were disgraced and disregarded by the Mohammedans. The Mohammedans, with the avarice of victory, plundered the freedom of the world; the Mohammedans were compelled to be on their knees before the superior might. In the same way, when we look into the pages of the history of Europe we find that the Roman emperors, while riding their horses, used to put their feet on the shoulders of the submissive sovereigns; but the time came when Romans had to suffer for the oppression and barbarity they had rendered to other nations, intoxicated with their imperialistic pride, kingly grandeur and grand civilisation. The invisible hand of Nemesis gave such a heavy slap on the majestic face of the Old Rome that the Roman imperialism was obliged to knock out its true nature—the mockery of civilisation.

Similarly, we can take the case of an individual, a group, a nation or a country, and can, very confidently, say that Nature, according to its unchangeable principle, does not exempt any party from getting proper reward or retaliation for its good deeds or misdoings.

Just in the same manner efforts put forth for the right cause produce good results, though at one time at an early stage and at the other at a later one. In accordance with the law of Nature the Renaissance Movement of Europe brought out the best results awakening the people of Europe to a new life. Exactly the same law was applicable to the results of the Renaissance Movement of Bengal.

To the West the shock was given by the concussion of the Arabic civilisation and the faith of Islam. The insensibility of the intellectual sufferings of Europe—a visible insignia of the Dark Ages—turned into the sense of reason. This shock was the foreshadow of the intellectual progress in Europe. There happened afterwards the revival of the Latin and Greek antiquities giving rebirth to Latin and Greek art and culture. The shock was also followed by a new interpretation of the Christian Scriptures. Both revival and interpretation, acting together, formed the

full Reformation and Renaissance.

To the East the shock was given by the concussion of the Western civilisation which infused something uncommon and new in the East, helping forward its remarkable rebirth. There happened afterwards the movement for bringing back into vogue the Sanskrit classics—the treasures of the early Aryan Age. The shock was also followed by the reformation from within of the ancient Hindu mythology. Both revival and reformation, acting together, gave prominence to the Bengal Renaissance Movement led by the most enthusiastic leader—Rabindranath Tagore.

During the time of Sir William Bentinck, Lord Macaulay planned for introducing the English language as the medium of instruction in India. His famous minute was written in 1835. In support of his scheme he himself said that it should be their endeavour, as far as possible, to create such a mass in India as would do the intermediary work by conciliation and compromise between them and millions of subjects. In Bengal it was then a burning question whether the introduction of the English language in accordance with Macaulay's minute should be encouraged or not. It was one of the most momentous question ever discussed under the sun. Perhaps one may doubt the importance of the question but no wise brain, aware of the issues involved, not for Bengal only but for the whole of the East, will find any exaggeration in the significance of the question.

It was no less than Macaulay's folly to disregard Sanskrit classics and Bengali literature. He was guilty, in the eyes of our countrymen, of pouring contempt upon the Sanskrit language. Nevertheless Macaulay had the upper hand; people's voice fell on deaf ears. However the people received a shock. Their sentiments were aroused and they were naturally compelled by their conscience to go deep into the Sanskrit classics and there came the hour of revival.

Prof. Wilson in 1853 while delivering a speech before the Parliament expressed his opinion about Macaulay's minute saying that in reality they had

created a mass of the English-knowing people who had no sympathy with their countrymen and if they had had any, it was of no avail to them.

In a way, Prof. Wilson was right. Just after the introduction of the English language the new life which first appeared led to the shaking of old customs and ancient convictions, and the social sphere was disturbed to an utmost extent. The people were thrown in a vast ocean and they had to strain every nerve to reach the shore. They needed from without a shock and they had got it. They struggled to get out of the commotion. At this stage Wilson's insight proved practically at fault. Quite reverse to his expectations, the English-knowing people proved true sympathisers of their countrymen and every unit of their sympathy was of real use to their motherland. The language which can express most modern and scientific ideas immensely increased the potentiality of our Indian vernaculars.

Raja Rammohan Roy was the one prominent personality whose noble presence played a great part, at this juncture, in saving Bengal from misfortune. His self-command, distinctive character and tutelary spirit singled him out among his contemporaries. His prophetic vision made him one to gauge, quite accurately, the force of every new current. He also had the qualities to foresee the results of every movement and guide the people in his own way with an accuracy incapable of missing the mark. Raja Rammohan Roy was not the least of an opportunist. He could never tolerate to wait for dead men's shoes. He was rather of the belief that chances are always at our threshold and we are to pick them up. He paved out a new road, vehemently promoting the new Western learning and helping forward Macaulay's programme with all his zest and zeal. But his efforts put forth in this respect did not, in any way, correspond to Prof. Wilson's version. The best spirit of his remarkable life was prone to fill the hearts of Bengalees with a true reverence for the Indian past. It would naturally lead to the revival of the Sanskrit classics, for the

Indian past was bright mostly with the same. Taken in this sense Raja Rammohan Roy was the crown of the revival movement. Besides, he never neglected his own vernacular, the Bengali language, rather recognised its full value by bringing it back into literary use.

Our Poet's father, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, was the next prominent personality known for the literary revival in Bengal. The Maharshi got his early education at the school founded by Raja Rammohan Roy and was influenced by the teachings of the latter received by him through his teachers in the school. The Maharshi was same to Raja Rammohan Roy's kingdom of thought as Akbar was to Babar's kingdom of India. The Raja rooted a plant deep in the soil of Bengal and the Maharshi watered it, protected it and made it grow into a fruitful tree.

The Maharshi enjoyed a life of eighty-eight years. During this long period of his life he ever remained busy with his Brahma Samaj work. He personally went from place to place preaching the Brahma religion and establishing branches of the Brahma Samaj. To him ancient India was the cradle of all that was pure in morals and religion. " He was a man," says his son, Satyendranath, " more deeply imbued than any one in modern times, with the genuine spirit of the ancient rishis. It is singular that the one field of religious inspiration which was foreign to him was the Hebrew Scriptures. He was never known to quote the Bible, nor do we find any allusion to Christ or his teachings in his sermons. For him the Indian Scriptures sufficed. His religion was Indian in origin and expression, it was Indian in ideas and in spirit." The Maharshi's religious character and moral strength gave spiritual light to that age with an eminence of its own. His holy personal influence was immensely impressive and he was known as ' Maharshi ' not only among his Brahma Samaj circle but the title was given to him by universal consent. During the days of the collision of foreign and Indian civilisations his spiritual authority held his country close to its own historic past. Raja

Rammohan Roy was the stronger influence in moulding the life of Devendranath. Devendranath, like Raja Rammohan Roy, did never hesitate to stand against old, hackneyed convictions, harmful to the society of the day. He was the prominent promoter of the Adi Brahma Samaj, Sadharan Samaj and Brahma Samaj. "To my mind," says Prof. Max-Muller, "these three societies seem like three branches of the one vigorous tree that was planted by Rammohan Roy. In different ways they all serve the same purpose; they are all doing, I believe, unmixed good, in helping to realise the dream of a new religion for India, it may be for the whole world—a religion free from many corruptions of the past, call them idolatry, or caste, or verbal inspiration, or priestcraft,—and firmly founded on a belief in the One God, the same in the Vedas, the same in the Old, the same in the New Testament, the same in the Koran, the same also in the hearts of those who have no longer Vedas or Upanishadas or any sacred Books whatever between themselves and their God. The stream is small as yet, but it is a living stream. It may vanish for a time, it may change its name and follow new paths of which as yet we have no idea. But if there is ever to be a new religion in India, it will, I believe, owe its very life-blood to the large heart of Rammohan Roy and his worthy disciples, Devendranath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen."

Devendranath instilled spirit and life in the hearts of his people who had great love and reverence for him. They followed him to reach the inner cores of their hearts and moved their senses for higher ideals—to bring in a creative period in the Bengali literary history. This movement brought home awakening of Bengal. Owing to this movement there also set in a creative period in the history of the whole of India, giving a beginning of a new era for the East.

Besides other lively factors the conflict between the new Western learning and the revived Sanskrit classics left its deep impressions upon the face of the Bengal Renaissance. Toru Dutt, alive with her womanly grace and charm, gave vent to her feelings

in a foreign language but the fragrance of the Sanskrit past is so beautifully macerated in her writings that our ancient culture is conspicuous of her songs rendering them to be a valuable national asset. Michael Dutt was a wonderful poet. He encircled the world's heart with the depth of his poetry. He began by composing his poems in English verse, and while his beautiful expression of his elevated thoughts had won name and fame for him and besides his being considered one of the best English poets his literary powers were still at their height, he bade good-bye to his pen which had a swift flow in English verse. It was just the time when he accorded enthusiastic welcome to his mother tongue resulting in the richness of the Bengali literature. All his later poems, in Bengali, are written in a strikingly resonant and majestic metre. He was truly, as he was called, the Milton of the Bengal revival. Bankim Chander's novels remind us, when we read them, of the romance writings in the West. They clearly reveal the zest with which the young Bengal was exploring its new-found treasure.

This period is important from another point of view. The writers of this era evinced an unusual interest in the study of the English language but at the same time they stuck to their own ancient ideals. They drank deep at the Pierian spring of the Western knowledge but their love of Indian thought and culture was not affected in the least. They were not swept away by the influence of English studies. They simplified the language as also the subject-matter so as to suit the exigencies of their own people. They did not dwell upon the far-fetched themes but depicted the village life of Bengal in their works. They chose their subject-matter from the rich store of their glorious past. Thus they tried to inspire their readers with the ancient culture of their own country ; to infuse a broad and liberal kind of nationalism into their minds and to bring them into contact with the best that had been thought and done by their forefathers.

Young Rabindra was the torch-bearer of this ideal.

His indefatigable zeal for revival of ancient Indian culture accomplished more than any other of his contemporaries. Bankim, the celebrated novelist, has been called the pioneer of the Bengal Renaissance. Tagore may be called the high-priest of this movement.

Art comes easy to Rabindranath. Highest art, it has been said, is unconscious and Rabindranath's art is undoubtedly unconscious. It is said of him that a certain gentleman approached him to interpret a poem of his, which had baffled his understanding for long and Tagore's retort was, "Ah! who knows what it means?" He wrote through vision and his vision was quick and open. Though not on purpose, much of his works are replete with the gospel of his father in his own inimitable simple style.

It was not more than three decades back that he came into the lime-light. Even his countrymen did not recognise his genius before he was lionised by the West with the Nobel Prize. His early poems are subjective but the subjective tone is replaced by the prophetic one in his later verse. No longer he sits in the remote corner to enjoy himself the ravishing delights of Nature. He is out to rub shoulders with the common humanity, to share their lot of sorrows and sufferings, to face the pangs of hunger and poverty, to make a bold stand against the icy hand of death without any fear, and realise God in his contemplations.

Fame and honour did not make him intoxicated. He never forgot his humbler friends. He was never indifferent to them even when at the highest rung of the Fortune's ladder.

He drew his inspiration from the soil of Bengal and in turn his songs and poems inspired, enchanted and guided the Bengalee youth. Most of his compositions are symbol of the rising hopes and aspirations of his own people. He has filled their hearts with rosy dreams of "Golden Bengal." Bengal is the acknowledged land of song and music and through Rabindranath's influence all the song and music has been directed at realising that dream.

The Poet is a man of vision and in his sub-conscious mind there is a sacred sense of awe that God has visited his people and through his music and literature he has filled the mind of his people with this awe. Verily India retains even today her living faith in the Unseen.

For a true understanding of the temperament and character of Rabindranath Tagore, it is well worth to recall the environment in which he was nourished and brought up. When his father, the Maharshi, was present in the house, all the household became still and hushed, as if anxious not to disturb his meditations.

He was quite young when his mother died. Her face, when he saw it for the last time, was calm and beautiful in death and awakened in him no sense of childish terror ; it did not excite even wonder ; all seemed so peaceful. It was much later that he was conscious of death's real meaning.

In his childhood he was too much given to loneliness. He remained away from his father, yet his father's influence was the deepest on Tagore's life. To him he was literally the fountain-head of inspiration. When the icy hand of death had bereft him of mother's fond love, he was kept in the charge of the servants of the household. He would sit day after day in his room and peeping through the window would roam in a world of imagination.

Since his infancy he worshipped Nature. To him a mere piece of cloud coming up in the blue sky would make feel with joy. Nature supplied him the food for his imagination in his leisure. He never felt the loneliness of his early life. To him Nature was a loving companion, that never forsook him and always revealed to him new treasures of beauty and joy.

He would get up from sleep early in the morning and would roam about in his garden and the meanest flower that grew there filled him with thoughts too deep for tears. A mere breath in the open sunshine would awake him to new life. The trees, green grass the chirping of sparrows, all conspired to thrill him, through and through.

The Poet realised the inner beauty of the soul one fine morning in the Free School Lane, Calcutta. He felt as if the thick veil of ignorance was rent asunder with a dramatic suddenness. His mind was unusually calm and reposeful. He was lost in watching the sunrise from the Free School Lane. All of a sudden he felt dazzled of an inner vision. The veil was rent, the darkness had gone. He felt that everything was self-luminous ; every noise a perfect rhythm, every creature saturated with godhood. He realised that there was unity behind all diversity. He beheld one behind many. The distinction of form and colour was lost. Every person, even the tiniest of living beings, was invested with the glory and freshness of a dream. A solemn glee possessed his soul. He was wrapped in meditation. His heart was full of love and gladness born of it.

Then he went to the remote places ; he scaled the dizzy heights of the Himalayas in search of such ethereal joy ; such inner vision of things but he sadly failed. He felt ever since that this world is brimful with joy and glory visible to those who have pierced the thick veil of ignorance. The thick wall of sorrow vanishes like a cloud in the radiant light of love. Love transforms the most commonplace thing to a thing of beauty and joy. It seemed as if his capacity for love was challenging all limitations. He loved everything great as well as small. He saw his God where the pathmaker was breaking stones; where the tiller was tilling the ground. He loved the labourers whose garments were covered with dust and faces withered with fatigue.

This ecstatic mood possessed him for several days on end. His brothers decided to have a pleasure trip to Darjeeling. Tagore accompanied them. He thought he might have a greater thrill of this blissful experience—oneness at the core of all things. He expected to find more harmony and severity in the height of the Himalayas than in the busy thoroughfare of the Sadar Street. But alas he found that all along he had been labouring under a delusion. He wrongly thought

that truth could be got from outside. The majestic and lofty peaks could whisper no truth into his eager ears but the concourse and noise of people in the Sadar Street had done that. The Almighty Lord ; His wonder works. He works alone, unfathomed and unknown. He can open the whole universe in the narrow space of a single line ; He can exhibit the whole world in a grain of sand ; can hold infinity in the palm of your hand and eternity in an hour.

The volume of his poems entitled *Morning Songs* is the expression of Poet's ecstatic period—his first vision. He is impatient to realise the beauty of the world. But for lack of practical experience his lyrics though full of imagination are not intimately related to common human experience,

Circumstances, however, so conspired that it was no longer possible for him to live in an enchanted land of dream and imagination. His father soon gauged the sensibilities of the poetic genius of his son and felt that his intellectual development was tending to become lop-sided, if he did not rub shoulders with the practical men of the world. With this end in view he sent him away to supervise the family estate right on the bank of the Ganges. This change was a double blessing to the youthful Tagore. Firstly, it brought him into contact with moral life of Bengal. Day after day he moved and talked with the native village-folk and dealt with the practical affairs. He began to understand and appreciate their rising hopes and also the fears that were looming large before their eyes. He awoke to the pangs of poverty and misery. He had never understood these monsters before. The second advantage that he derived from the change of environment was that he had a fine scope to commune with Nature. He could find no better place than the sacred bank of the Ganges for Nature study. The calm and tranquillity inspired him to " ecstatic heights in thought and rhyme." He would roam from village to village in his boat and breathe fresh life.

Most of his time he passed in silence. For many days at a stretch he would not exchange a single word with

any living being till his voice became thin and weak through lack of use. During his boat excursions he had the chance to study and converse with the village-folk, to watch their custom and traditions, to share their joys and sorrows and feel their wants and limitatations. This gave him enough material to take to short story writing. Many of the short stories written in those days are excellent and some think these to be superior to many of his well-known lyrics.

Next phase in the life of Tagore begins since he went to Santiniketan from Shilaidah. When he was supervising his father's estate, he was feeling restless like a young eagle to fly away and find wider scope for his talents. The monotonous life at Shilaidah was only a long period of preparation.

As time passed on he was becoming aware of an inner call to give up the present work and dedicate his life to the service of his country. At last he could not control this passion. He first came to Calcutta and then to Santiniketan and decided to found a school. The difficulties to realise this aim were many. The main was of raising funds. He spared nothing that belonged to him. He sold his books, his copy-right and everything that he could lay hand on but the task he had assigned for himself demanded much more than he could give. For a time it appeared that the mission he had chosen would fail ; but he carried on the struggle and the trials and tribulations that beset his way worked a great and wholesome change into the life of the Poet. These very obstacles proved to be the birth-throes of a greater man in him. They worked a great change in his own inner life.

At forty, his wife died. He had scarcely recovered from this rude shock when his daughter developed symptoms of consumption. Her precarious condition compelled him to give up school and nurse and tend her but all his efforts proved in vain. She succumbed to illness leaving gap in the Poet's sensitive heart never to be filled again. But the worst had yet to be. The Poet's youngest son, upon whom he bestowed more care than others, fell suddenly ill with cholera and

died within a few days.

Death had preyed upon three of his dearest ones within a small interval but made herself the loved companion of the Poet—no longer an object of fear; but a bosom friend. He had realised by this so-called calamity that death was a great blessing in disguise. It was his belief that not even an atom in this universe is lost. He was aware of a sense of completeness. To him death, in the last analysis, was not a calamity but a perfection.

It was during this period of travail that *Gitanjali* was written. The original was written in Bengali. "I wrote these poems," the Poet said, "for myself. I did not think of publishing them when I was writing." He has attempted to express fullness of human life, in its its beauty as perfection. These lyrics are full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical inventions. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes.

The last phase of his life is that of the traveller, the pilgrim. He began to keep indifferent health and was compelled to set out to Europe for a change. But the outward change worked a spiritul change as well. He felt a new spiritual unfoldment.

As soon as he left the Indian shores he realised that his own soul was overgrowing the limitations imposed by outside factors. He imagined himself a voyager to the open road ! to the emancipation of the self ! to the realisation of Love.

In a letter to Deenabandhu Andrews dealing with the meeting of the conflicting races of the world and the removal of colour prejudice he observed that the meeting of the races on equal footing was the greatest question that concerned the fate of Homo Sapiens and that no sacrifice would be too great to solve this vexing problem once for all and achieve the victory of God in Man.

Oversea travels had completely changed his outlook. He began to face questions and problems of international interest. He cast aside the narrow

nationalism which had been the dominant and the most insistent feature of most of his poetry and songs. The philosopher was awake in the Poet. He began to weave a philosophy of his life and thoughts and interpret the deeper meaning of life. It should not, however, be construed from the above that his lyrical zeal had cooled down by this time. He had been pouring his musical strains till the very last day of his life.

The *Gitanjali* has resulted in bringing the East and the West close together in a common fellowship and understanding. The Poet has been able to bring about a remarkable synthesis of culture of the East and the West. To achieve success in this field in the face of so much racial prejudices and religious conflicts is no mean achievement.

The coming generations will hail him as an angel of peace and goodwill towards mankind and by following in his footsteps shall so behave towards one another that struggle and strife will become a thing of the past.

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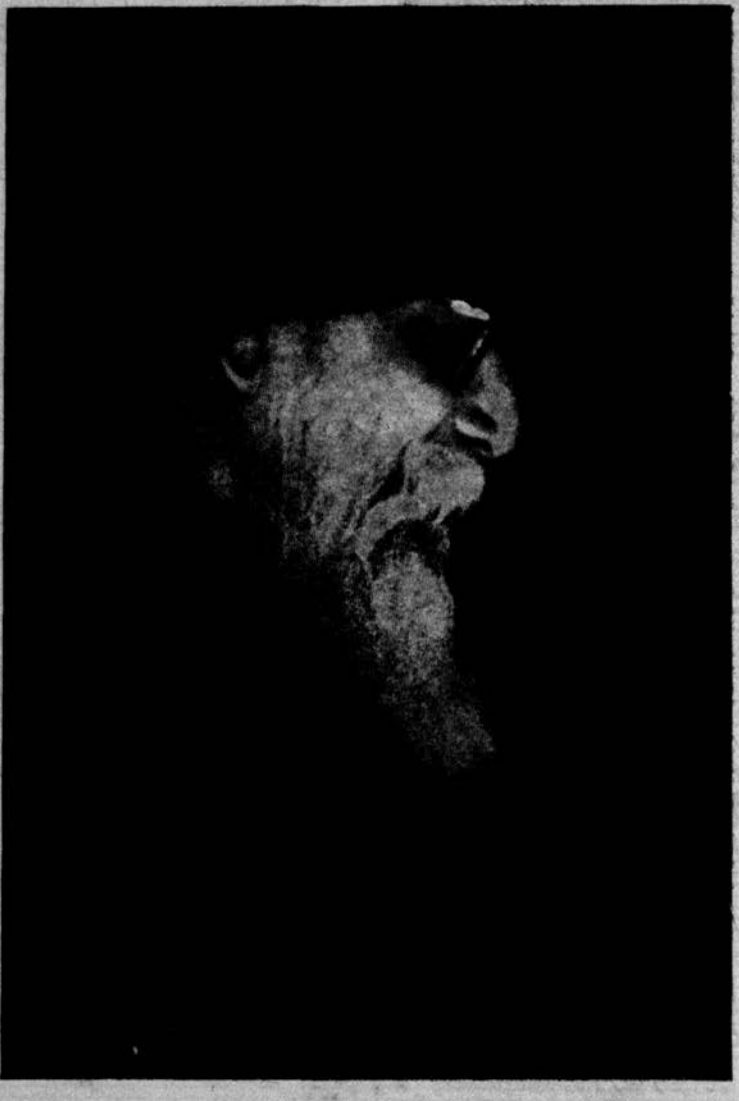


TAGORE IN MARCH, 1941

II

THE PATRIOT IS BORN

You are the reason why
India should be free.
—WILL DURANT

THIS land of ours is no sand-bank thrown up by some recent caprice of earth. It is a stately growth with roots striking deep through the centuries. Nations have a history as well as a geography. They live and grow, not by the forces of wind and rain, sun and stars, but by the passions and ideals which animate them . . . . . Any one who has studied and meditated on the ancient classics of this country will testify to their peculiar greatness, their power to yield new meanings and their inexhaustible value as a criterion of present-day modes of life.

Rabindranath Tagore was the veteran of the Eastern culture. He was proud of the Indian past and with all his zest and zeal awakened in the people the desire to live like a free cultured nation.

Rabindranath saw the light of the day in 1861. He was born and brought up when the echo of the Indian War of Independence of 1857 was resounding his environment. His father, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, although known for his zeal for social reform, was out and out a nationalist in his outlook. Maharshi was a prominent member of the British India Association for his social zeal. Sir Richard, the then Governor of Bengal, referred this institution as a society of free-thinkers and ruthless critics of the British Government. Shri Rajnarayan Basu, the maternal grandfather of Shri Aurbindo Ghosh, while remarking in his autobiography about the strong nationalist views of Deven Babu, observes that he had never been keen to have

relations with Europeans. He was rather so indifferent to them that even praise for him from Europeans could do no good to his heart. He was of opinion that from the view-point of Indian politics there was such a world of difference between Indians and the European rulers that there could never be a common ground between the two . . . . Such staunch political views were inherited by Rabindranath from his father. Especially in his early age father had been a fountain-head of inspiration for him.

It was the same hereditary spirit which gave vent to his expressions which he made through his words in reply to the address given to him by the literary men of India who went to Santiniketan to do honour to the Poet on his being awarded the Nobel Prize. "What brings you, gentlemen, here today?" he said. "You, whom I had failed to please so long, what have I done, pray, now to please you so mightily? It is not my worth, but the recognition of the foreigners, that has evidently worked up this sudden outburst of appreciation. I thank you for your generosity; but excuse me please if I refuse to get drunk with you over this gilded cup of foreign wine."

In spite of all this the Poet had great love for humanity without distinction of caste, colour and creed. He had full faith in man. He believed in the culture of man, may it be the Eastern or the Western. "I have no distrust of any culture," he said, "because of its foreign character. On the contrary I believe that the shock of such extraneous forces is necessary for the vitality of our intellectual nature.

"What I object to is the artificial arrangement by which foreign education tends to occupy all the space of our national mind, and thus kills or hampers the great opportunity for the creation of a new thought-power by a new combination of truths. It is this which makes me urge that all the elements in our own culture have to be strengthened, not to resist the Western culture, but truly to accept and assimilate it; to use for our sustenance, not as our burden; to get mastery over this culture, and not to live on its

skirts as the hewers of texts and drawers of book-learning."

His love for his countrymen was as bountiful as his love towards humanity. In 1882-83 when he was managing his own estate his emissary eyes, which had for long been searching for the truths and realities of life, happened to study it in its bareness. The needs and difficulties of the poor peasants were to him an open chapter of the book. There he came into deep contact with the labourers. Unlike other zemindars he felt humiliated to spend his days among the poor in a princely fashion. He lived among them as if he was one of them. He was never tired of hearing their complaints and demands. His door was open upon all at all hours. That was the first time that he saw the life of the villagers. He was very much touched to study their sorrows and sufferings. His feelings expressed in a letter show us that he had a fund of sympathy for the poverty-stricken peasants. It was no doubt difficult to conceive, he wrote, as to when the ideal of socialism was realised. But if, however, he added, it was not realised, it would mean that God was unkind and the masses were unfortunate. If misery and poverty were inevitable in this world, he continued, the helpless masses were not likely to vail of distress but he was confident that it was possible to stave these off if those who had a burning desire to lighten the load of miseries of Mother India were afforded the opportunities of serving her.

It is quite apparent how restless the Poet would feel at the sight of the painful plight of the poor. In the capacity of a zemindar his treatment towards others was always praiseworthy and when he found that he was helpless he relinquished the charge of the estate.

When the cow-protection movement was started by Lokmanya Tilak, Rabindranath joined hands with him and raised loud protests against cow slaughter. In 1898 the Lokmanya was tried in the court on the charge of his so-called anti-British activities. Rabindranath censured this undesirable attitude of the Government in the *Bharati*. The Poet exerted all

his influence and eloquence to raise funds for the defence committee organised to fight the case of Lokmanya Tilak. The people of Bengal are known for their taking prominent part in the public demonstrations held to protest against the arrest of the Lokmanya and the improper attitude of the British Government. The stir was the natural outcome of the impressive and inspiring writings of the Poet.

When section 124-A (sedition) came into force, he started a strong agitation against it in Bengal. His poem *Kanthrodh* which was written in those days enables us to witness the reaction on the Poet's heart of this outrageous law.

It was just in those days that plague spread over different parts of the country and the Poet tried his best to make arrangements to soothe the sufferers. The Poet said that if the Government wanted that there should be no unrest in the country they should change their course of action and harness all recourses in their power to drive away the epidemic.

In 1902 Lord Curzon charged Indians of being given to falsehood. Rabindranath did not spare him and refuted the charge in no uncertain terms. In his *Bang Darshan* he proved, by recounting instances of the malacious propaganda of the English against the Boers, that that was a common practice of the English, unworthy of a civilised nation. The Poet quoted Herbert Spencer in support of his arguments.

In 1903 poems were chiselled out in quick succession by his fascile pen, all purporting that injustice must be resisted and that the aggressor must be paid in his own coin.

As early as 1904 he drew up a complete scheme for the reorganisation of our villages with the revival of cottage industries to help remove the poverty of the masses with the co-operation of the peasant himself. His idea of national regeneration through his comprehensive scheme of rural reconstruction, now being worked out at Sriniketan, is undoubtedly his great contribution to constructive politics.

His well-known work *Swadeshi Samaj* was published

in 1904. It sums up the Poet's political ideology of those days.

He delivered his speech on *Boycot*: on 7th August, 1905, in the open session of the Indian National Congress with a view to encouraging Indian goods.

In 1905, to demonstrate the unity of the Bengal province, the *Raksha Bandhan Festival* was observed with great grandeur and glory. For the occasion Rabindranath wrote a beautiful poem entitled *Rakhi* which was recited in a large procession. On 16th October a grand public meeting was conducted under the presidentship of Anandmohan Basu, the president of the Madras Congress Committee. In this meeting Rabindranath acted as interpreter On the dispersal of the meeting the audience started in procession singing songs and shouting slogans. This procession was led by the Poet who was singing a song of his own and the processionists were reciting in chorus after him.

In the Congress session of 1913 held at Calcutta Lokmanya Tilak proposed the name of Dr. Annie Besant for presidentship. Rabindranath strongly supported him. He himself was elected chairman of the reception committee. In this session he recited a poem entitled *India's Prayer*. On the other day his play *Post-Office* was staged. The audience including Lokmanya Tilak, Annie Besant, M. M. Malaviya and many other notable patriots appreciated the Poet's patriotic spirit.

His artistic genius was in full bloom those days. His poems full of lofty patriotism are unique and unsurpassable. They are sure to leave their mark in the literary annals of India. He was a pioneer in the cause of national education. He took sides with Surendranath and opposed Sir B. Fuller. That he was a man of practical imagination was apparent from his work in those days.

When terrorism began to make its way in Bengal, Tagore withdrew himself from the political field. But at heart he was a staunch nationalist all along. The British Government always looked upon him with

suspicion. Although he had given up taking active part in the political movement, yet the Government issued orders in 1912 that no public servant should admit his children in Santiniketan. It was in the neighbourhood of the same period that a renowned American advocate visited Santiniketan and examined the ways and means of training. He was of opinion that the methods of teaching in Santiniketan were the most modern and psychological. The American advocate's statement created more love for Santiniketan in the hearts of the people of Bengal.

In 1919 Jallianwala-Bagh tragedy was enacted. Thousands of innocent souls were put to death. General Dyer, the author of the deed, almost boasted of his achievement. To him it was a 'merciful' act to fire without warning on an inoffensive crowd because it might have made fun of him if he had refrained from doing so. He admitted that he could have dispersed it without firing, but that would have been derogatory to his dignity as a defender of law and order. And so, in order to maintain his self-respect, he thought it his duty to 'fire and fire well' till his ammunition was exhausted and two thousand persons lay dead and wounded.

The shooting in the Jallianwala Bagh was not the only feat that General Dyer performed. His subsequent conduct was no less revealing of his perverted state of mind. He told that he 'searched his brain' for a new punishment, a new terror for the people—something, as General Hudson put it in the Imperial Council, to 'strike the imagination.' And the punishment that was devised did credit to General Dyer's ingenuity and ferocity. It was worthy of the days of Inquisition. All Indians who happened to pass through a certain lane were forced to crawl on their bellies like worms. This was the punishment meted out to all innocent and peaceful men who went that way. These atrocious deeds of the British Government cut Rabindranath to the quick and he relinquished knighthood. On this occasion he wrote a letter to the Viceroy. This letter will occupy a conspicuous place

in the political history of India. This letter is an indicator of the lofty patriotism of the Poet. "Your Excellency," he wrote, "The enormity of the measures taken by the Government of the Punjab for quelling some local disturbances has, with a rude shock, revealed to our minds the helplessness of our position as British subjects in India. The disproportionate severity of the punishments inflicted upon the unfortunate people and the methods of carrying them out, we are convinced, are without parallel in the history of civilised governments, barring some conspicuous exceptions, recent or remote. Considering that such treatment has been meted out to a population, disarmed and resourceless, by a power which has the most terribly efficient organisation for destruction of human lives, we must strongly assert that it can claim no political expediency, far less moral justification. The accounts of the insults and sufferings undergone by our brothers in the Punjab have trickled through the gagged silence, reaching every corner of India, and the universal agony of indignation roused in the hearts of our people has been ignored by our rulers—possibly congratulating themselves for imparting what they imagine as salutary lessons. The callousness has been praised by most of the Anglo-Indian papers, which have in some cases gone to the brutal length of making fun of our sufferings, without receiving the least check from the same authority, relentlessly careful in smothering every cry of pain and expression of judgment from the organs representnig the sufferers. Knowing that our appeals have been in vain and that the passion of vengeance is blinding the noble vision of statesmanship of our Government, which could so easily afford to be magnanimous, as befitting its physical strength and moral tradition, the very least that I can do for my country is to take all consequences upon myself in giving voice to the protest of the millions of my countrymen, surprised to a dumb anguish of terror. The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in the incongruous contact of humiliation, and I for my part wish to stand,

shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen who, for their so-called insignificance, are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings. And these are the reasons which have painfully compelled me to ask Your Excellency, with due deference and regret, to relieve me of my title of knighthood which I had the honour to accept from His Majesty the King at the hands of your predecessor, for whose nobleness of heart I still entertain great admiration."

This act of the Poet is not only a proof of his lofty patriotism but goes a long way to make it clear to the aggressors that in spite of centuries of subjection the sons of Mother India still have place in their hearts for the spirit of freedom and that when they are pressed with high-handedness, they will not spare any distinction to be sacrificed in the name of their Great Mother.

Indians were those days cursing Sir Michael O'Dwyer, General Dyer and others, but the Poet by relinquishing his title acknowledged what Lala Lajpat Rai has said in the following words: "In my humble judgment it is the system which needs cursing, if that can give any satisfaction to the persons aggrieved. The men are the mere tools of circumstances. They may overdo a thing; but so long as they are told that the maintenance of the system is the main thing and that it has to be done at any cost their fault is only secondary."

In 1920 Gandhiji started non-co-operation movement. It was Rabindranath who first conceived the programme of encouragement to the use of Indian goods and boycott of the foreign ones.

There existed a deep and abiding mutual love and reverence between Gandhiji and Rabindranath. Rabindranath did not have so much zeal for khadi and charkha but for Gandhiji these were the articles of faith. In spite of this variance the two agreed on the principle of non-co-operation.

In his youthful days it was the express opinion of Rabindranath Tagore that it was a good thing to start country-wide agitation. But agitation, he said, should

be directed towards our own country rather than to the foreign Government and that when the people realised the necessity of civic rights, the deliverance from the British yoke of bondage would not be a distant dream.

Although his Muse underwent a revolution yet there had not been the slightest change in his political outlook. His subsequent writings especially his reply to Miss Rathbone's letter give us a peep into his mind. "I should have thought," he said, "that the decent Britisher would at least keep silent at these wrongs and be grateful to us for our inaction, but that he should add insult to injury and pour salt over our wounds passes all bounds of decency."

"Through the official British channels of education in India," he reveals, "had flowed to our children in schools not the best of English thought but its refuse, which has only deprived them of a wholesome repast at the table of their own culture."

A nation is always judged by the eminence of its great men. India, which gave birth to Rabindranath, the greatest man of this age, can claim her due share of respect and recognition among all nations. Rabindranath was a towering genius who discovéred all the main problems of humanity and the methods of uplifting it to a higher plane. With the lamp of his personality he approached the great wisdom of India, as embodied in the Upanishads and the past heritage of our culture. He was a patriot in the true sense of the word. He was zealous not only for the freedom of his own country but for the rights of humanity. Unlike the modern patriots, who have been made to aim at their gaining superiority to their fellow-beings and their using all means, fair and foul, in their power with the purpose to rule over others, he hated this belief, the insanity, in honour of which the man has suffered division and dispersion at the cost of complete unity and has blindly sacrificed candour and co-operation resulting in disturbance of the peace of the world. His patriotism never lay in violently capturing the territories of the weak nations. He was rather proud

that his countrymen did not possess the spirit of aggression. He was not a man of India alone. He was a great torch-bearer, whose business it was to illuminate the future path of the unfortunate and weary nations of the world. To them all he showed through the burning experiences of his own intuition the true heritage of mankind for the salvation of humanity.

Rabindranath stands before us a true lover of humanity. The elegance of the soul of a cosmopolitan is too dear to him to accept the limitations imposed by space and time or even by the geographical boundaries.

III

QUEST FOR SELFHOOD

Man is true where he feels his infinity; where he is divine; and the divine is the creator in him.

—RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

TAGORE blew the great trumpet of peace in the war-worn world. Having discovered the fountain-head of eternal tranquillity in his own soul, he moved heaven and earth to quench the desire of the blood-thirsty world with the elixir of everlasting peace. Tagore summed in himself a momentous era and has been the mouthpiece of great ideals. The mission of Tagore has been indeed the mission of India. He was a glorious internationalist whom Mother India brought forth out of her womb in a travail of political upheaval. He was not merely a versifier, building an ivory tower in a rose garden. Practical idealism was the golden thread of his nature. His words had an electrical effect even on the hearts of the war-lords whom the fresh red wine of blood has made so giddy as to be indifferent to the happiness of others.

Rabindranath Tagore has been well described as the Plato of his age. To the world at large he is known only as a mystic poet of India. But in many other fields he was even greater. He was a great short-story writer. Many of his short stories rank with the world's classical literature. He was a novelist of repute. In the field of fiction Tagore is one of the three greatest novelists that Bengal has produced. He was a well-known social critic, an eminent journalist and a shrewd essayist. He has done a yeoman's service in carrying the torch of education among the dumb millions of his country. Above all he was a philosopher,

a thinker and a religious preacher. As a social reformer his work will be appreciated by many generations to come. Of course, he was a first-rank political thinker. He was caught up unaware in the whirl of turbulence which Delhi-London pivot is generating. But his political achievement was not the child of blind sentiment. It was based on cold logic. He did not like to adhere himself to any one single party, creed or dogma. He never subscribed to the conventional kind of views on men, manners and matters. He was a poet in the truest sense of the term, a composer and a creator. Towards the declining years of his life he surprised the world by producing some of the finest specimens of painting. These have reserved for him a unique niche in the temple of fame. The painters of Bengal acknowledge him as the fountain-head of inspiration. Verily he has been one of those few "rich" personages who left the world richer by their foot-prints on the sands of time.

In spite of an immense range of his deeds and doings he has been unflittered and whole. As a matter of fact Rabindranath has been successfully struggling to realise himself through his manifold activities. His life and achievements can be judged by the yard with which we measure Goethe and Shakespeare.

Tagore is a romantic poet of the highest order. And yet it would appear strange to a romanticist like Keats that Tagore should ply art for the sake of self-realisation and not for its own sake. And yet Tagore is not the first in this novel adventure. "A tradition," says Yeats, "where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble."

The great unifying force in Rabindranath's life is the search for a formula of universal happiness. For that one noble goal he has burnt the candle of his life at both ends. He tried many paths but his centre

of approach was one. He did not care only for artistic self-expression or personal enrichment. All his activities are only part of a ceaseless quest for self-realisation. He was never in favour of leading the life of a hermit. He wanted to live and breathe among men. His faith in life on this earth is as unshakable as his faith in life to come. In different eras of history there have been great men who ceased to take a continued interest in life. Tolstoy thought that death was the most baffling dilemma of life. Many a moralist has been much overawed by death. But right vision has dawned on the men of true spiritual temper like Tagore. He sought refuge in contemplation. Eternal beatitude lies in the heart of all the good things of the world.

Mystical faith has nothing to do with sterile brand of religiosity. That makes men live in the Slough of Despond. They turn upon life as certain fierce snakes are believed to turn upon each other. Thus mysticism is a double-edged knife. It stands on the cross-roads of awry pathways of hope and fear, optimism and gloominess. The mysticism of Tagore is a joyous creed. It transforms the joy of life into a higher, a purer, and a more enduring form of joy. It creates a mood of unworldly elation which tends to blunt the keen edge of the human joy of life. It blanches its radiance as the sun does that of the moon. It is only necessary to turn to St. Francis. Even the most childlike and sincere adoration of Nature can turn away the true mystic from voluntary abnegation of all the gracious things that the physical universe has to offer to us. That, one should say, is the mystic way. Rabindranath Tagore is an exception to that rule. He is a mystic and a humanist at the same time. He has staunch faith in the life which is believed to lie beyond death.

Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of life has anchored itself in the faith in an eternal existence. It has not fastened itself less exultantly to the existence which will be cut off by the unexplained mystery of death. For all the strength of his faith in an after-life, he is a clinging, trusting child of mother earth. Her

supreme gift, so far as the individual's memory is concerned, comes but once to man. He is unable to get over the fact that within the bonds of one birth and one death alone are we given the sole unbroken stretch of consciousness. There alone we can feel experience enriching previous experience, tint laid on tint.

That is what gives the poems of Tagore a great humane touch and he ceases to be a mere mystic merry-maker of light and colour. Thus W. B. Yeats writes about *Gitanjali* in his eminent introduction : " I have carried the manuscript of these translations about me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me."

The subtle philosophy of Tagore's mind has cast its indelible stamp on his life and life-work. Without it one finds no key to the variety of his interests. He values life. He feels equally strongly its evanescence. Therefore, he has turned to life and the world with all the strength of his immense vitality. He garners his harvest while it is day. He has felt his way forward to each kind of activity that could contribute to the sum-total of his being. Like a creeper he spreads out his tendrils towards the sun. He has gone about with his wand and struck at each source of life-giving water. From poetry to politics he has spread out the tentacles of his consciousness. The whole world seemed to be of the very stuff of his own being. There is something elemental and stark in this quest for selfhood.

No wonder, there is much of vegetable-worship in the poetry of Tagore. Like Wordsworth he is the high-priest of Nature. Angelic simplicity is the chief halo of Tagore's poetry. His poems have an untranslatable delicacies of colour, as we find in flowers. " The work of a supreme culture," says Yeats, "they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and rushes."

In one of his letters Tagore compared himself to a plant on the newly emerging earth.

"I can very well remember, ages ago when the young earth had just raised her head from her sea-bath and was greeting that day's just risen sun, I, coming from where no one knows and carried on the crest of the first wave of life, had shot up as a plant in her virgin soil. Then it was that in this earth I first drank the light of the sun with my entire body under the blue sky; I waved myself like a little child in blind but glad stirrings of life; I hugged my earthy mother with all my roots and took my fill; my flowers blossomed and my shoots came forth in unreasoning delight."

It is notable that Tagore holds our mind spell-bound, while the European saints have ceased to hold our attention since the Renaissance. "We know," says a great European writer, "that we must at least forsake the world, and we are accustomed in moments of weariness or exaltation to consider a voluntary forsaking; but how can we, who have read so much poetry, seen so many paintings, listened to so much music, where the cry of the flesh and the cry of the soul seem one, forsake it harshly and rudely? What have we in common with St. Bernard covering his eyes that they may not dwell upon the beauty of the lakes of Switzerland, or with the violent rhetoric of the Book of Revelation?"

The entire body of Tagore's artistic, intellectual and social activities is part of his quest for selfhood. He is one of magic master-minds in painting, music or poetry. Yet he does not throw aside gems of art for man's regard or disregard. Rabindranath exactly remembers what milestone each of his works forms in the growth of his personality. This is a common happening with men of letters. His studies go to form a personality no less than a book. The most important product of study is not the book but the man. This attitude is rare among creative artists.

Rabindranath's versatility and eclecticism are amazing. They include activities rarely ever undertaken by a single individual. They also embrace emotional, ethical and intellectual shades mutually destructive.

Rabindranath's liberalism has not prevented him from giving one of the best expositions of Hindu conservatism. Yet his contempt for Hindu conservatism as popularly practised is well known. He has felt alternatively drawn towards nationalism and internationalism, towards extreme aloofness as well as folk cultures and beliefs. In certain of his short stories, he has shown himself to be in perfect imaginative contact with certain types of life.

Versatility is one side of Rabindranath's quest for selfhood. Yet he has all through his life been a rebel. He has received his share of loyal devotion from a small band of followers. Often he has voyaged alone; in strange silences with his soul. He has had to fight his way out through an environment stonily unsympathetic. The bitterness of Rabindranath's struggle is owing to commonplaceness in the society in which he was born and had to work.

He has not rhymed handily with his fellows. Nor has he put his feet in shoes which were a little too large, so that every foot could get into and get out of them. The common man's search for selfhood bears no proportion to Rabindranath's. So uncompromising, so idealistic, has he been. He has driven himself hard. But he has not trodden on the toes of the men among whom he has had to work. Naturally, they are not as sore as he himself is. Rabindranath's struggle started with his school days. Any other man would certainly have been left morally scarred by it. There is in Rabindranath, too, a strain of disillusioned bitterness. Certain of his sentences rasp out a lack of charity about his fellow-countrymen. It hurts and rankles. But these rare and passing moods do not mar the permanent courage of his nature. That is due above everything else to the internal discipline of the man. He has tempered on almost morbidly sensitive nature. He tamed his antisocial philosophy of life. For one less chastened, it would have been a source of untold agonies. No one can say that Rabindranath has not suffered. It is all too evident in his life and works. For all that he has

gone through he has not succumbed.

Rabindranath's anger is not for us. Many have misunderstood him. His pen, his sword, are reserved for a higher cause. Against tyranny of every sort he has nursed a hatred. He is like a child made to suffer in silent un-understood anguish. He has hated cruelty with all the strength of his masculine hatred. It is only against injustice that he has all along been the great rebel. But no, that word does him an injustice. He has been more than a rebel, he has been a fighter, a fighter without fear and favour.

Thus the rhymer of divine songs dedicates his life to the Creator and his creation. The last verse of the last poem in *Gitanjali* aptly sums up Tagore's ideals of self-realisation :

> "*Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee.*"

IV

THE GREAT WORLD SOUL

The detailed facts of history, which are the battle-ground of the learned, are not my province. I am a singer myself, and am ever attracted by the strains that come forth from the House of Songs. When the strains of ideals that flew from the East and from the West mingle their murmur in some profound harmony of meaning it delights my soul.

—RABINDRANATH TAGORE

LET us for a while think of the significance Tagore had in his personality, in his poetry, in his art, in his music, that he was so commonly adored, so respectfully honoured and so universally loved.

He was born in Bengal; he was nurtured in the traditions of Bengal; he spoke the language of Bengal. Why then are his works enshrined in the hearts of millions of human beings of the world? What is the secret? What is the reason?

The secret is his inner self, his inner light, his deeper insight that could at once probe into unfathomable reality and for the emotional sincerity of his mind. Throughout his vast output of poetry, short stories and philosophy and miscellaneous writings he always swings back to the ever-recurring refrain —refrain of the ideal unity; the fulfilment of the human soul through the Divine and the urge for emancipation of the fettered soul by doing away with the disruptive passions which tear gap in our vision of the One and create isolation in our self from the universal humanity.

Even a casual student of his biography will feel that he chose his religion through a process of gradual growth and not through inheritance or importation.

He was born in a family which since long had been pinning their faith on the teachings of the *Upanishadas* and consequently developing a sort of monotheistic religion. In his early life religion did not captivate his heart at all. He was too sensitive to accept any school of religion on authority. All dogmatic creeds repelled him.

He could not persuade himself to imagine that he had a religion simply because all those whom he loved and trusted believed in its value. He was, therefore, brought up in an atmosphere of freedom of thought and action. No creed could appeal to him that had its sanction in the authority of some scripture. His mind was never influenced by the teaching of any organised body of worshippers. Even in his early years he was meditative and susceptible to scenic beauties Every phase of landscape, seascape and cloudscape inspired him to read into the riddle of the Unknown. The torrid fierceness of the burning sun, the blessedness of the welcome rain, the brightness of the clear sky, the incarnate fury of the storm, the loveliness of tropical summer noon and the pleasant sight of the morning sunrise filled his mind with thoughts too deep for tears.

In short his religion was a poet's religion—neither that of an orthodox man of piety nor that of a theologian. The beauty of the visible world struck his prismatic imagination and dissolved into rainbow colours, the very personality of the singer melted into his song until he ceases to be a man and becomes a voice, a lyric incarnate.

It was not until he was eighteen that he had the first trance of religious experience—a vision of the One. One day he was watching the silent sunrise behind the dewy veil of autumn morning, his mind was serene and enraptured as never before. Suddenly he felt as if the mist of ignorance had thawed into the morning light and revealed the inner beauty of the world. The thick veil of ignorance was rent asunder and all things and men assumed radiant looks. He was conscious of an ineffable joy, a

super-personal world of man. The trance lasted for four days. On the first day of this sudden awakening of the soul he wrote a poem entitled *Awakening of the Waterfall.*

Through this poem the Poet depicts his vision by an analogy of a waterfall. The waterfall suffers the tortures of aloofness until it adheres to its individuality and remains in its ice-bound isolation. Suddenly it is illumined and touched by the sun which exhorts it to merge its little individuality and seek a continual union with the sea. It bursts into a cataract of freedom and seeks its finality. After a few days the vision passed away and all things and all men faded into the light of the common day.

Years later when he was in charge of his father's estate he had another vision of this kind. One fine evening, when he had disposed of the ordinary work of the day and was peeping through his window at the market place welcoming the sudden shower of rain, he felt that his world of experience which had baffled his understanding before, was initiating him into its deeper meaning. His mental exaltation was like that of a man who ultimately reaches his destination after facing many a storm and mist which had slackened his pace and narrowed his vision. All things became luminous with truth. He found that everything was in a state of flux but tending to reach the same One Goal.

These successive mystical experiences filled the youth with the conviction that there must be some being who was guiding him and his world and was seeking His best expression in all his experiences. He felt that this very Being was working with and through him towards the process of creation. This gave him a great joy—this idea of mystery of a meeting of the two in a creative comradeship. The sting of his bygone sorrows was lost as he had found his religion at last. It was the religion of man in which the infinite became defined in humanity and came close to him so as to need his love and co-operation.

He was blessed with a subtle sense of mystery

which on analysis may be found to be a complex emotion compounded of awe in the presence of the Unknown, wonder, in the presence of the known and an exquisite response to the manifestations of beauty wherever they may be found, that we may call for want of a better world—rapture. His unusual sense of wonder gave him a niche into the depth of existence. He gave up his scholastic studies because he did not want to keep away from the world. In the school he felt like a bird in a cage confined to the four walls of the alma mater. This will, perhaps, explain the meaning of his religion. He never wanted to lose contact with the world which was permeated with a subtle touch of relationship and which added to the value of his own being.

In his youth Rabindranath came in possession of a collection of lyrical ballads composed by the saints of the Vaishnava sect. He was so much moved by these love-poems. He would often speak on universal love and freedom and say, "My heart is not mine to give to one only, it is given to many." Through these words he definitely gave the message of unity in diversity, for again he says, "The Lord is in me, the Lord is in you, as life is in every seed." At another instance he explains his implication of freedom in the true sense of the term, "I am able to love my God because He gives me freedom to deny Him." From this source spring all his thoughts of universal love and freedom and he would preach in the words of Lord Krishna :

> "There is true knowledge. Learn thou, it is this :
> To see One Changeless Life in all the lives,
> And in the Separate One Inseparable."
>
> **(The Song Celestial)**

He sings of love that ever flows through innumerable hindrances between man and his Creator, the eternal relation which has the relationship of mutual dependence for a fulfilment that needs perfect union of individuals and the Universal.

The lover, in his sense, is the Supreme Lover whose touch we experience in all our relations of

love—the love of Nature's beauty, of the animal, the child, the comrade, the beloved, the love that illumines our consciousness of reality. Indeed, love is one of the great universal forces. It exists by itself and its movement is free and independent of the objects in which and through which it manifests. It manifests wherever it finds a possibility for manifestations, it manifests wherever there is some receptivity, whereever there is some opening for it; what you call love and think as personal or individual thing is only your capacity to receive and manifest the universal force.

Because it is universal, it is not therefore an unconscious force; it is a supremely conscious power. Consciously it seeks for its manifestation and realisation upon earth; consciously it chooses its instrument, awakens to its vibrations. Those who are capable of an answer, endeavour to realise it in them that which is its eternal aim, and when the instrument is not fit, drops it and turns to look for others. Men think that they have suddenly fallen in love, they see their come and go and then it fades—or endures a little longer in some who are more specially fitted for its more lasting movement. But their sense in this personal experience of theirs was an illusion. It was a wave from the everlasting sea of universal love.

Love is eternal. It never perishes. It is God. And, we must become godlike if we are to know what God is—rather in Prophyry's words "Like is known only by the like, and the condition of all knowledge is that the subject should become object

Tagore says: "God finds himself by creating.. And, this universe is the creation of God. Tagore believed in terms of certainty that God's creation is like God. But for every human being this world is a different world. In fact every man lives in his own imaginary world. He himself creates his own world and passes his days like a shadow. So if he has taken the wrong way, he will lead a troublesome life in his own wrong creation; and if his world is

devoid of illusion, he will lead a peaceful life. So the Poet has said, "We read the world wrong and say that it deceives us."

Similarly, such as men themselves are, such will God Himself seem to them to be. For as it takes two to communicate the truth, one to speak and one to hear, so our knowledge of God is precisely and accurately limited by our capacity to receive Him. Simple people conceive that we are to see God as if he stood on that side and we on this It is not so. God and I are one in the act of perceiving Him. "I, O Gudakesha," says the Lord in the *Bhagvad Gita* (10 : 20), "am the SELF, seated in the heart of all beings ; I am the beginning, the middle, and also the end of all beings."

The Poet explains the same fact in a rather scientific way. "The infinite personality of man," he says, "comprehends the universe. There cannot be anything than can be sub-summed by the human personality, and this proves that the truth of the universe is human truth .... Matter is composed of protons and electrons, with gaps between them; but matter may seem to be solid. Similarly humanity is composed of individuals, yet they have their interconnection of human relationship, which gives living solidarity to man's world. The entire universe is linked up with us in a similar manner, it is a human universe. I have pursued this through art, literature and the religious consciousness of man."

Tagore believed that he had come 'to the great fair of common human life.' From this point of view he represented a movement of thought which stresses an active life in this world as against the run-away philosophy of life preached in this country for over two thousand years. According to him, to try and escape from the world is as truly suicidal as to seek escape from ourselves. The universe has it soul-side which is one with our soul-side, and our love of life is a healthy instinct, and is really our wish to continue our relation with the great world.

"He who does good," speaks the Poet in the spirit

of universal love, "comes to the temple gate; he who loves, reaches the shrine." You can do good, consciously or unconsciously, to a vicious man or a mean person but you cannot love him unless you follow the Poet with a staunch belief in his sayings, "the Lord is in me, the Lord is in you, as the life is in every seed." You can do good to a diseased mind—a lunatic run amuck—by avoiding the use of force against his brute might but your good, devoid of love, cannot mend the wrong-doer. If you say "I shall not use force" and stick to it merely because you think that the use of force is violent and not good, you certainly misunderstand the implication of universal love and non-violence. There must be within you an upwelling of love and pity towards the wrong-doer. When there is that feeling it will express itself through some action. It may be a sign, a glance, even silence. But such as it is it will melt the heart of the wrong-doer and check the wrong.

The world is the creation of the Almighty. The Almighty is within me; the Almighty is within you; the Almighty is within he, within the smallest of the flowers, within every particle of the dust. So if you feel you must love God, you must love His creation.

One who opens his eyes and tries earnestly to see the world, to him the world puts off its mask of vastness and becomes small as one thing, as one kiss of the eternal. This is what Tagore has preached through his poetry. This is the brightest ray of the Sun which had risen to give light to us through his message of universal love, the message of unity in diversity. This is the feeling that Blake has crystallised in the lines:

To see a world in a grain of sand
And a Heaven in a wild flower,
Holding infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.

So the true lover, in the full sum of the word, is one who knows there is unity under diversity at the centre of all existence.

Tagore says: "The fish in the water is silent, the

animal on the earth is noisy, the bird in the air is singing.

" But man has in him the silence of the sea, the noise of the earth and the music of the air."

Or, in other words, the Poet explains that the man is the masterpiece of God's creation.

He further says : " Men are the children of light. Whenever they fully realise themselves they feel their immortality."

Or, in other words, the Poet says that God has created the man after Him.

The human love, therefore, is symbolic to Divine love. It is governed by similar laws and gives rise to similar results.

To love one's ownself is also the same as to love another person because love, in both cases, is the human love. Such a love exercised by the lover with the consciousness of the immortality of his being goes to prove the self-sufficiency of the lover. And, none is self-sufficient except God. And, none is immortal except God. But the man is self-sufficient, the man is immortal, and so the man is God. Truly the man is God if he is conscious that he is God—as was Mansur, as was Shamas.

Love is another name for what the Poet calls the 'truth of human unity.' We have our greatest moments of delight when we merge and realise ourselves in others. This is the definition of love. This love bears proof of the One whole from which emerge many and which is the final truth of man. Love is the great magician which clothes the bareness of earth with the glory of Summer. Love and self-surrender are essential for success, for releasing us from the sole monarchy of hunger, ' of the growling voice, snarling teeth and tearing claws, from the dominance of the limited material means, the source of cruel envy and ignoble deception.'

Love brings about deliverance of our consciousness from the illusory bond of separateness of self. It kindles our hearts and illumines the human world with a light that never was on sea, nor land.

Says the Poet, " Our union with a Being whose activity is world-wide and who dwells in the heart of humanity cannot be a passive one. In order to be united with Him we have to divest our work of selfishness and become *Viswa-karma* (the world worker), we must work in all." In Buddha's words he would say :

"Above you, below you, on and all around you, keep on the whole world your sympathy and immeasurable loving thought which is obstruction, without any wish to injure, without enmity."

It may be observed in this connection that Buddha's conception of infinite was not the unbounded cosmic activity, but the infinite whose meaning is the positive ideal of goodness and love, which cannot be otherwise than human. According to him no state of *Nirvana* is attainable by the cultivation of negative virtues but by the removal of all barriers to love. The self must rise above all trivialities and realise the truth which is love itself, which links us with the rest of the humanity through the bonds of sympathy and service.

When Buddha had preached his gospel to the chief among his disciples, one of them rose up and asked, " All along you have nowhere mentioned about God, about the original cause of existence. Should we, then, take that there is no God ? " Buddha's quick and unequivocal retort was " I do not say that there is no God but I do not say that there is God ; but surely such a speculation goes beyond the human sphere as our goal. It has nothing to do with man's *dharma*, his inner nature, in which love finds its utter fulfilment. This is the ultimate truth that we need to know in this sojourn of life."

Tagore defines religion as an attempt to reconcile the contradiction between the brute nature of man and his transcendental nature. Prompted by his original cravings man is always after fulfilling his immediate vital needs—but he is also conscious of a supreme spirit deep within himself which often, if not always, runs in contrary direction to that of

the former. Sometimes this contradiction is so great that one nature has to be willingly sacrificed over the other. A *mahatma* (great soul) sacrifices his vital needs and often courts death in order to express the supreme spirit within him. Religion inspiresus to be constantly moving across the obstructive facts and realising our true self. The desire for this higher life proimpts men to go through an endless struggle for survival.

Let us now see what his idea of goodness is. Goodness, according to him, is the freedom of the self in the world of man, as is love. It is not sufficient that the outer good work of man may continue to produce good results, but at the same time the individual should be true in his goodness. The inner perfection of his personality has its own immense value. Goodness represents the detachment of our spirit from the exclusiveness of egoism. We are good when we merge ourselves in the universal humanity. The value of good does not consist in some benefit for our fellow brothers but it lies in the emancipation of our spirit from its fetters of passion. In order to be good we have to be true within, not for worldly duties but for our spiritual fulfilment. Life even in the face of stern reality of death demands the fulfilment of several duties. All the material phenomenon bends low before the might of death. The greatest prosperity comes to an end, the mightiest empire in the course of time dissolves into shreds. The heyday of glory vanishes into emptiness and all our mortal relationships come to their end but we cannot afford to ignore our duty towards them. If we behave as if all these things do not exist the iron grip of Nemesis will not spare us Any attempt to disregard the mortal bonds results in strengthening and prolonging them. We cannot attain our goal by destroying our path. In his moral life man has the sense of his obligation and his freedom at the same time, and this is goodness. He can attain freedom in his mortal relationship by owning responsibility for community, thus utilising its collective

power for his own benefit. He realises the freedom of the consciousness by feeling one with the rest of the humanity and can find fulfilment in life by consecrating it to the cause of truth and love.

We cannot better conclude this thesis than by having a bird's-eye view of the Poet's ideas on modern times. Acquisition of money, he holds, has come to occupy a prominent place in society and has brought about a great change in our mental outlook. It has called in aid of science to get into our brain and affect our heart. The modern age has become so money-minded that saturated with the insatiable desire for its acquisition man has resorted to his primitive barbarism and an unscrupulous system of propaganda. Money has evolved the cult of power as its ally. The net result of this new outlook has been an ever-growing unhappiness among the masses. A large part of the masses have been deprived of their humanity. The evil forces are rampant in the society and the ideal of wholeness has lost its cohesive force therefore it has been loosened into sections of fragmentary character. Labour is a force; so also is the capital; so are the Government and the people; so are the men and women. This disruption has generated a great amount of mutual strife, rivalry and competition and has lost the wholesomeness of creation.

According to the Poet our present-day education is producing a type of mind which is not conducive to the spiritual understanding of truth which is the ultimate reality of existence. The reign of machine and of scientific method has dethroned spirituality from its niche and has reduced man to a homeless tramp. The Western man coming after such a long voyage has only tried to exploit the Eastern spirituality for lust of material gain. In modern civilisation the teeming multitudes of men are being employed as tools for the accumulation of wealth and power and thus it has revealed man imperfectly, for man's true expression does not consist in the fact that he is a power but that he is a spirit. The result has been a seething dis-

content in the individuals as also the races. A sure disaster is looming large before their eyes which is sure to affect even the most successful people of the world and put an end to their intemperate indulgence in material luxuries. All the big powers of the world cry for peace but the methods that they adopt to secure their end defeat their own purpose. Instead of putting a check to their ever-growing greed and lust and giving up their exclusive prerogative of exploiting those who are weaker, they are multiplying their destructive weapons for mutual security. In the light of their spiritual ignorance they do not realise that by so doing they are generating an unseen force which some day is sure to rend that power into pieces. How beautifully has he said somewhere, " Politicians calculate upon the number of mailed hands that are kept on the sword-hilts : they do not possess the third eye to see the great invisible hand that clasps in silence the hand of the helpless and waits its time. The strong form their league by a combination of their powers driving the weak to form their own league alone with their God."

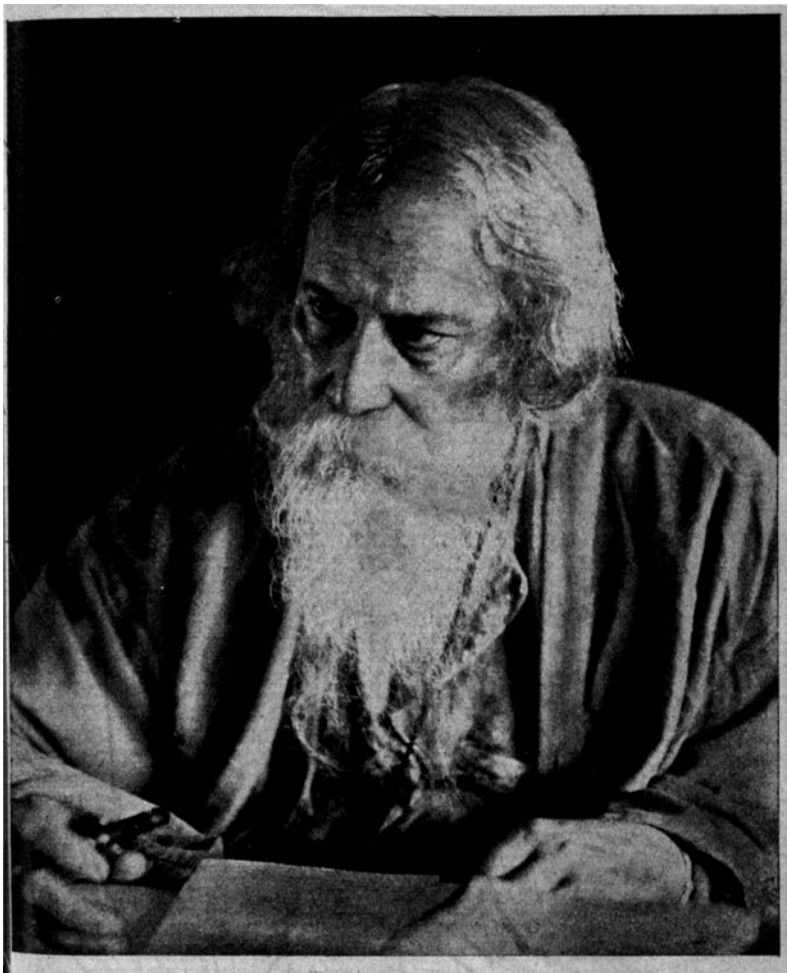
V

THE HUMANE LABORATORY

It is my nature that when I accept any responsibility, I become immersed in it, doing my duty with all my might, and never shirking my responsibility. At one time it fell to my lot to be a teacher, and I did that work wholeheartedly, abandoning myself to it and finding great joy in it. And when I was engaged in zamindari *work, I set myself to master all its intricacies and unravel its secrets. I acquired fame for the methods evolved by my own thinking, so much so that neighbouring landlords used to send their officers to me to learn my methods.*

—RABINDRANATH TAGORE

I WAS in my early teens when she happened to see me. She was a young German lady approaching her extreme twenties. She told my father that she belonged to the Christian Mission. Her simple appearance and pleasant nature had a great attraction for my father. He attended to the talk, she had with me, and gave ear to the apologues, she related to me, deeply absorbed in thought. He was touched by her true-heartedness so much so that he could not help calling her " Christ's True Apostle ". Her humbleness could not find words to acknowledge my father ; she conveyed to him her thanks with a light smile on her lips which were ready to kiss his child whom she had held close, a moment before, to her bosom. I do not remember her name but I can recall, even after thirteen years, that gracious noble figure with the same gentle smile on her lips and motherly look in her eyes. I can also safely recall to my memory one of the interesting questions she put to me . . . . . " What's the population of your country ? " she asked. " About three hundred thirty million " was my prompt



THE POET AT HIS DESK

reply. Turning to my elder brother, who is about two years senior to me, she said, "Can you count three hundred thirty million, one by one?" "Why not?" he replied instantaneously.

"Then how much time will you take?"

"A few hours."

"A few hours!" repeated the German lady.

"Yes, a few hours," he replied with confidence.

"Then count, my dear boy."

"One, two, three, four, five," he began to count.

He had hardly counted one hundred before she said, "Two minutes are over."

Dividing 330,000,000 by 100 and multiplying by 2, she said, "Don't forget, my dear boy, it will take 6,600,000 minutes, *i.e.*, 12 years, 203 days and 8 hours even to count the population of your country."

It was quite an ordinary talk and, at that moment, the correct answer of the question carried no value, for me, more than the solution of a riddle. But, now, when I am conscious of the qualities of my head and heart, I can look into its background which carried with it a very strong idea– a logical representation of the mightiest man power.

According to the latest census report the population of India has increased by seventy million, making a total round number of 400,000,000, the biggest population in the world, next to China. Of its people it can be said without fear of being accused of boasting that, all in all, they are not inferior in intelligence to any other race. "Indians are in no way inferior to the Japanese," Tagore stresses upon the fact, "either in intellect or capacity. The fundamental difference between the two lies in the fact that whereas India is not only overcome but is also overwhelmed by the British, Japan has never allowed her interests to be clouded over by the benevolent protectorate of some European power." There is no gainsaying the fact that Indians have a glorious civilisation and an ancient culture behind them. There have been occasions when Indians fought for the British and thrust

themselves into the danger zones so bravely that even the enemies could not help praising their martial spirit. There have also been occasions when Indians were put to work alongside of the people of other races on a footing of equality and they held their own very well.

India is a country which has all types of men, all kinds of climate and all sorts of land. It is, as such, no exaggeration to say that in India we can grow or make almost all things we require for the use of our countrymen. In comparison with all other countries on the globe India has first place in sugar production, second place in rice, tobacco, cotton and tea production, and third place in wheat production.

Nature has also blessed the huge area of India with valuable minerals below the ground, thick forests above it, and with a large stock of cattle. India is fortunate enough to have one-third of the cattle of the world.

But still India is a miserable country. The bred and born of this country go about in torn and shabby rags and shiver in winter owing to lack of money with which they can buy clothes they need.

I have seen with my very eyes, not once but very often, poor starving beggars with their hands put into the dustbins in search of eatables.

"I look around," remarks Poet Tagore, "and see famished bodies crying for bread. I have seen women in villages dig up mud for a few drops of drinking water, for wells are even more scarce in Indian villages than schools."

Just imagine the misery of millions of path-makers who break stones all day long, and bear the scorching heat of the sun on their naked bodies, but fail to get a handful of grain in return to the sweat of their brow.

India has the most fertile land but most of us do not have the chance to enjoy even one proper meal—proper in the true sense of the word—in the whole of their lives. India has decidedly the best climate but most of us are too unfortunate to get fresh air.

India is rich in minerals but its people are poor in wealth. India possesses huge area of two million square miles but its people live huddled together in dismal, dark and smelly slums. India has as much as one-third of the animals of the world but our children do not get enough milk. We are one-fifth of the population of the world but have absolutely no say in the matters of shaping the destinies of the world.

"I hate poverty," speaks Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru addressing the meeting of All-India Congress Committee on 7th August last. "My grievence against the British is that they have made Indians miserable, poverty-stricken, wrecks of humanity."

"I look around and see riots raging all over the country," says Dr. Tagore in the same spirit. "When crores of Indian lives are lost, our property looted, our women dishonoured, the mighty British arms stir in no action. Only the British voice is raised from overseas to chide us for our unfitness to put our house in order."

At another instance he regrets that 'from ancient times the people of our country have been accustomed to rely upon others.' Referring to his early experiences in village Shilaidah he says, "It was difficult to help them because they despised themselves. They would say, 'We are dogs—only whipping and beating will keep us right.'"

Shilaidah is one of the seven hundred thousand villages of India. Nine out of ten people of India live in villages. But none out of the nine is educated. They believe in out-of-date old convictions. They are of the belief that God has made them poor and that it is just according to the will of God that they are in a wretched, miserable plight, disgraceful to humanity. For centuries long they have been deprived of education and its true spirit. They fail to find out means for their own welfare unless they are led by some outward power, because the long periods of illiteracy have deprived them of the sense of responsibility for their own lives.

India is a country of villages. Whenever any one

among us or a foreigner is to describe an Indian, he will, to make his description correct, describe a typical villager with his body bare to the waist, his feet bare, the rather thin *pagri* on his head, a short torn *dhoti* being all the clothing he wears, and some implement—an insignia of his labour of cultivation—in his hand . . . Out of every hundred among us there are about seventy-two who depend upon cultivation, or in other words two hundred and eighty-eight million people of India are cultivators. Whenever there arises any question of the interests of India, such a vast majority of people cannot be ignored at any cost. No democratic government will ever work successfully in free India unless and until the rights of our peasants are safe and secure. No reform, ever introduced, will be in the interest of the country unless that is beneficial to the peasant millions. No step towards freedom is ever possible unless this majority of our teeming millions is aroused of the right of freedom. Our national leaders today are fully conscious of these facts. For the last few years Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress have been doing their best for rural uplift according to their well-planned programme and their endeavours have no doubt resulted into an enormous success. The peasants are, however, still poor but they have begun to realise that they are poor and what their poverty owes to. They are still uneducated but they will not object if their coming generations welcome education.

When Tagore began the work of rural reconstruction, he did not think in terms of the whole country. He could not take responsibility for the whole of India. He rather wished to win only one or two small villages because in his opinion if he could free only one or two villages from the bonds of ignorance and weakness, there would be built, on a tiny scale, an ideal for the whole of India.

Tagore was a fellow citizen, bred and born of the biggest city of India. His forefathers were among the earliest settlers of Calcutta. He had never had the opportunity of experiencing the pleasures and priva-

tions of the country-folk. He had started his Santiniketan as early as 1901. In the midst of Santiniketan work when he was busy heart and soul with his activities, he happened to be engaged in the management of his ancestral property.

In connection with this work he had to live at Shilaidah and Potisar. That was the first time that he saw the life of the villages. He was then a zemindar and his tenants used to bring before him their delights and their difficulties. He was never tired of hearing their complaints and demands. His door was open upon all at all hours. People could come to see him at any time from daybreak till night. They could talk to him as if he was one of them. They never hesitated to put before him what they had in their mind to say.

It was a general practice with Tagore that he never displeased a visitor. A friend says that he would be all ears when he was attending to a visitor, whether the visitor might be an acquaintance or a stranger. While seeing him busy in talk with a visitor one would certainly wonder as to how he could get time for so many other businesses. Even in correspondence he had set the same example. He never left any letter unanswered. He never seemed to care whether the writer of the letter was a stranger or known to him. He would reply to every letter in due course. If it was only a little chap quite unknown to him he would receive a reply. If it was a mere tiny doll with heart and soul, she would get an answer.

Similar was his attitude when he was living at Shilaidah and Potisar. Several times it so happened that he spent his whole day in receiving his village guests and did not notice even if the time for food had passed. He would feel very happy in these busy hours because he knew that he was gaining something which would go a long way to give, some day, shape to his dreams.

Since the day he was engaged in his *zamindari* work, he had been a keen observer of all matters concerned with the rural uplift. Naturally he had most of the

capacity to grasp and know. He grasped what he saw. He knew what he grasped. He knew that his Santiniketan work would remain incomplete if he did not care for rural reconstruction. People used to put before him their sorrows and sufferings wherefrom he could have practical knowledge of their real needs and demands. He would think over the complaints and tried restlessly to satisfy the needs of the poor villagers.

By and by the sorrow and poverty of the villagers became crystal clear to him. He felt humiliated to spend his days among the poor in a princely fashion. He could, like most of the zemindars, keep his concern only with money-making. But such an outlook would certainly degrade his personality in his own eyes, if not in the eyes of the world. He hated this attitude. He put forth his endeavours in thinking out as to how he could arouse the villagers' minds, so that they might themselves feel the responsibility for their ownselves.

He was of the opinion that if help was rendered to the villagers from outside, it would not be as beneficial as to make them stand on their own feet. Such a help would in no case make them self-supporting. He disapproved outside help, for outside help could be withdrawn at any moment. His definite aim was to stir them to life.

It was a problem which required much thinking. The people were not capable to absorb any help. There was a vast current of inferiority complex prevalent in the mentality of the village people. They condemned themselves to an undesirable extent.

To start rural uplift work was quite a difficult task those days but with Tagore it was quite natural not to submit to difficulties. He disliked to lead a dull life with no difficulties. His temperament rose in rebellion against obstacles.

Suddenly one day fire broke out in the neighbouring village. Villagers lost their heads but could not do anything. Unfortunately there was no water in the village. Perhaps the people had no sense of their

own interests. They were forcibly driven out of their houses by Tagore's men. The latter had to effect violence. They had to do good with blows. They broke up the roofs of the affected houses to bring the fire under control.

The village people were not too intelligent to spoil their own small to save their own big. If they were not supplied with outside support, they would certainly have lost their part as well as their whole. But outside help is neither sure nor respectable. Tagore did not like them to look for help at others' faces and to suffer the violence of the others to ensure safety. His aim could be achieved only if he could educate them to have full confidence in themselves.

There has been a custom in our India that rich persons spend a part of their wealth for the welfare of the general public of their town, city or village, by erecting for their use some wells, *mandirs*, or *sarais* or by providing them with other facilities they may require. Hundreds of schools in India, many in small villages or towns and the others in cities, are also entirely supported by the rich individuals. According to the same traditional custom the big zemindars have been responsible for the protection of their villages. They have to look after the health and education of the people. According to Tagore this system is nothing but to weaken our self-reliance.

"By the benevolence of the rich," he said, "the village was kept in good condition. But as soon as they began to leave the villages and live in the city, the water dried up, cholera and malaria became rampant, and, in village after village, the springs of happiness were choked."

"I have never been one to accept old traditions," says the Poet. He was of the opinion that the people must be self-supporting; they must not cry for help when they are in distress. They may be poor but they must have the courage and spirit to live like civilised people. They should learn to dislike to be disgraced by the rich who care not a bit for the feelings of the poor if they are not in mood.

With a definite purpose of achieving his aim Tagore had to perish the old convictions. But to stand against the ancient convictions was a clear indication of his being prepared to revolt against the social organisation of the day. He was opposed even by the old people of his own family, the descendants of Prince Dwarkanath. Dwarkanath was Poet's grandfather. He was a very well-to-do personality ; and to maintain his princely dignity he was very lavish in his expenditure. He was truly the man who presented the example of the traditional zemindars. When he died he was found buried under debris of debts. When his accounts were checked, his liabilities amounted to about one crore while the assets were only forty-three lacs.

Tagore's estate was at a considerable distance from the river. There was a lamentation for constant shortage of water-supply. Tagore suggested the villagers that they should dig up wells and he would help them for the masonry. The ignorant villagers could not understand his true spirit. They refused to honour the proposal on the ground that their endeavours in the public-welfare work would result in spiritual benefit to Tagore, for they were of the conviction that in the court of the Almighty the merit always goes to the financial helper. They said, " We dig up wells and you go to heaven."

At another instance Tagore asked the villagers to take responsibility to upkeep the road he had got made from his cutchery as far as Kustia because, he told them, the road was for their comfort and was common to all of them. But they courageously refused to do so saying that they were to look after the road so that the Babus might come in ease.

Such people were not in a position to accept any help. Now Tagore was in a great fix. He had to fight with them for their welfare.

He bore insults at the hands of the villagers, he was opposed by the anti-propagandists, he was oppressed by the powerful. But he was a man of strong will. He remained firm like a rock. Neither oppressions nor insults could move him from his resolution.

Tagore built a house in the heart of the village Shilaidah. He wished that the people of the village should meet there in the evening after their day's work was over. He managed for them daily reading from the newspaper and the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. But this sort of club could not arouse their interest. He, then, engaged for them a teacher but no student turned up—the villagers did not show their inclination to co-operate with him. To them it was nothing but a fool's paradise.

Then people came from the neighbouring village and requested him to give the teacher to them. They promised that they would feed him, lodge him and pay his wages. So the school was started in the neighbouring village but after a bit of experience he gathered that his ideal would not be embodied and his aim would not be achieved.

"The glory of life," proclaim the wise, "is to give not to be given." Tagore had made his contact with the poor with his definite intention to give them something constructive and everlasting.

He would say, "When you give, give with respect." He himself followed his own saying. He was a zemindar. Unlike other zemindars he never treated his tenants with disrespect. On the other hand his tenants several times refused to act according to his suggestions. However he did not take ill of such instances. He would rather say, "Pride can never approach to where thou walkest among the poorest, the lowliest and the lost."

In spite of unfavourable circumstances he did not entertain doubt and fear. As the people were staunch believers in unhealthy convictions it was not an easy job for him to find out remedies to introduce reforms. He failed at the first instance. Nevertheless he had made a beginning. He was sure of his success later or sooner. He joyfully strove for it. And there came a time when his experiments proved a success. He revived many a village industry. He improved agriculture. He extended irrigation. He introduced organisation of co-operative societies. He started day and

night schools. Above all, he could infuse in his people the spirit of self-reliance.

Tagore would not call his activities a success if he had failed to make them realise that they suffered not because God wanted them to be so but because they had never tried to probe the potentialities that lay dormant within them . . . . . That was really a happy time for him and for his people. He had truly met them because he had come to them with his offerings and not with his wants.

" He worked earnestly for the revival of weavings and other arts and crafts of the country," writes Ramananda Chatterjee, an old friend of the Poet, " particularly village arts and crafts, and, contributed his full share to making education in India Indian as well as human and humane in the broadest sense and to the sanitation, reconstruction, reorganisation and rejuvenation of villages."

Official reports have also praised him as a model landlord for his activities for village reconstruction in his estate.

In spite of his firm will to serve the people in villages he did not have sufficient practical experience. He noted the peasants coming to their fields with their own ploughs and bullocks and ploughing only their own small fields. He suggested them that to work separately on their fields was sheer waste of strength. They should mix up their capital and resources and buy one traction-engine to get their ploughing done easily. He also advised them that when the harvest would be ready, they would store the whole in a place in the village where the merchant would come and buy all at a right price, and that the sale proceeds would be distributed among them. The villagers acknowledged the proposal in good spirit but they were afraid as to who would carry it out. When they put their question before the Poet, he felt sorry that he was too inexperienced to give a practical shape to his own proposal and realised that inexpert service was as much a dangerous thing as little knowledge.

Thenceforth he sent his son and late Santosh

Kumar Mojumdar abroad to learn agriculture and animal husbandry. As also he strove to learn himself according to his immediate needs, though later he could study farming, pottery, village economics, production of hides, manures, looms, tractors and so many other subjects concerned with the rural reconstruction.

It was in 912 that the Poet was in a suburb of London, named Ealing, where a transaction was made with Major Sinha, the brother of Lord Sinha, whereby the old house of Sriniketan was purchased. Very easily the whole matter between the two friends was settled. The price offered was immediately accepted. It seemed to come like a flash to the Poet, that there, on that very spot, something great was going to happen ; and today after thirty years we see how right he was. He thought of continuing the work there which he had begun in Shilaidah. The house was in a dilapidated condition and people said that that was haunted. A considerable amount of money was required to get it repaired. For a time nothing was done and it remained as it was.

Deenabandhu Andrews advised him to dispose of this house. How could he do so ? His achievement had begun as a picture in his mind. He had imagined it. He had thought of a great thing that ought to be done. He hoped that one or two purposes of his life would come to fruition there.

Any great man would do well to remember that his promotion depends largely upon his power to foresee and plan. His spirit to do adventures was aroused by his imagination.

Tagore was well experienced to make mind-pictures. Most of us say that ' to make imaginary pictures is the pastime of an idle brain.' This may be their way of saying that idle people always make visionary projects and perform nothimg. The truth is that imagination is the foreshadow of every great work.

For an instance, there was a poor boy of eleven in Switzerland. He could work well with his pencil. He drew the sketch of the bridge running over the river in his village. Suddenly came the picture of a great

bridge into his mind. He first became an architect, then an engineer, then a bridge-builder. When he was over fifty, he was afforded an opportunity of building one of the largest bridges in the world. The dream that he had when a boy became the master purpose of his life.

There are thousands of similar instances which can be added to the length of this article. Let me say that Tagore had the most amazingly creative imagination. He did not know how this house would help him to achieve his aim but the mind-picture of his aim was clearly visible to him. He started the work at Surul. To Surul he gave the name of Sriniketan and laid the foundation of the Rural Reconstruction Institute of the Visvabharati

He sowed the seed in an unproductive field, and expected that some day a shoot may suddenly spring up. Elmhirst, a friend of the Poet, helped him a great deal in his endeavours. It was he who developed this place into a separate field of work. Mrs. and Mr. L. K. Elmhirst have been for years helping to maintain the institute by an annual grant of more than Rs. 40,000. That is the main, if not the only, appreciable source of its income.

Our national leaders were yet thinking about rural uplift when Tagore started his experiments at Surul. He had a love for the villages and the villagers. He was helped in his mission by Elmhirst at whose hands the work met with great success. The seed which in the beginning did not show any sign of giving fruit, sprung up in a green plant mixed up with a sweet fragrance; and things which seemed to be lacking resulted into a tremendous success, followed by a delightful future.

Every reformer is apt to bear insults at the hands of his opponents. Even Mahomet and Christ, the greatest reformers the world has ever produced, were treated in accordance with the same unchangeable principle of this ever-changing world. There had been many an instance in the life of the Holy Prophet that he was abused by the non-Moslems, that filth was

thrown upon him, that he was strangled by infidels with a piece of cloth in his neck.

Tagore was rather fortunate that neither he was abused by his people, nor ill-treated in any other way of some serious nature. He had to defy some of his own near and dear ones who opposed him ; he had to stand against the rich who were never inclined to accept any reform ; and above all, he had to hear bitter words of the illiterate people who were too much depraved to accept any new idea.

There is an important event in the history of the Prophet and the Islam that Omar, a leading man of the Quraish, was bitterly opposed to Islam and the Prophet. One day he thought it would be better to slay Mahomet and finish the whole affair at a single stroke. Accordingly, he took his sword and went in search of him. On the way he met a relation of his who asked him where he was going. "To kill Mahomet," replied Omar. "Why don't you look to your own family first ?" said the man, "Your sister, Fatima, and her husband have also become Moslems." . . . . . Hearing this Omar turned his steps towards his sister's house. On seeing Omar they concealed the leaves of the Koran they were reading. "What were you reading ?" enquired Omar, "I have heard you have joined Mahomet." Saying this he fell upon his brother-in-law and beat him very severely. His sister came forward to protect her husband, but he beat her also. At last she cried out, "Omar, do what you will, we have accepted Islam and will stick to it." Her tone was very firm. Omar turned to look at her. Her face and clothes were covered with blood. He felt very sorry. His heart softened. He begged her pardon and asked her to read to him also what she had been reading. She read : "Whatever is in the heavens and the earth declares the glory of God and He is mighty and wise." She went on reading. In a few moments Omar's heart was won, and he declared himself a Moslem.

In a similar way the people of Tagore's estate who once disregarded his suggestions and frankly refused to act in accordance with his proposals, felt some

spiritual pleasure to devote themselves to his will. They respected his counsel with all their heart and revered him as their spiritual father. Once the Poet had to go out with an English magistrate of the district in which his estate was situated. Those were the days when Government officials, particularly English ones, were held in great reverential fear. A ryot was asked to arrange for the conveyance of the Poet and the magistrate. The ryot brought only one palanquin. When he was accused of the fault he explained that he thought it only natural and proper that anybody who chose to accompany Gurudev should walk. Again when he was asked he brought a gouty pony for the magistrate.

Like Deenabandhu Andrews, Elmhirst has been a true friend of India and Indians. Since the beginning of his relations with Gurudev, he has been a devotee of his and his ideal. Elmhirst's devotion was formed in the light of his knowledge and not in the darkness of his belief.

"The traveller has to knock at every alien door to come to his own." Elmhirst had to wander through all the amplitude of the outer world to reach the innermost sanctuary of his purpose. Courageously he passed over the dreadful difficulties he came across, and fought tooth and nail all the obstacles. He strained every nerve to ascend the summit of success and struggled to the best of his invincible will to bring out the accomplishment of his purpose out of his strenuous efforts.

Tagore was assisted by such a genius as Elmhirst who was at the same time a sincere worker. Tagore himself was a man who, as he says, never shirked responsibility. Their joint efforts were a source of favourable accomplishment and a matter of pleasure to both of them.

At the very outset of their work they had to infuse in the villagers the spirit of self-reliance. It could be accomplished by imparting education to them. So, under the Village Welfare Department night schools for the boys and adults of the working classes were

started.

"In 1913," writes Deenabandhu, "when I first came to Santiniketan, one of the teachers took me over the upland across the moor to Surul, in order to visit the house where this new venture was to be made and where our agricultural work was likely to begin. My heart sank within me as I noticed the dilapidated state into which everything had fallen. Indeed, the land all round the great central house had gone back into the jungle. It was clearly a deadly breeding place for malarial mosquitoes.

"When the Poet himself came back from Europe, I told him how I had marvelled at his act of faith and openly expressed to him my own misgivings; but he simply brushed them aside and remained quite resolute about the future. He seemed already to have foreseen, in his wide vision, what was going to happen.

"As we all fully expected, malaria became from the start our most relentless foe. Nearly every one who went over to live at Surul, especially after the monsoon rains were over, was stricken by a malignant fever. We soon began to realise from our own painful experience why the whole building and court-yard had thus fallen to ruin. For the place was a hot-bed of mosquitoes, and no one could live there for long with safety.

"Yet we had one singular advantage in carrying on our anti-malarial campaign. For Santiniketan itself, standing on a rising ground, was out of the danger zone and comparatively free from malarial infection. This was due to the fact that its soil differed entirely from that of Surul, which was on the alluvial mud-soil of the Ganges valley. Possibly, at one time, Santiniketan had been a sand bank, jutting out into the sea; for the sandy soil seems to go down more than a hundred feet, and the heaviest monsoon rains always dry off in a few hours.

"So it was possible to conduct a great part of the anti-malarial campaign in the earliest days of the experiment from Santiniketan, though from the very first there were those also who had to live at Surul all

the year round. Little by little the thick undergrowth was cleared away; the great tank was cleaned; new houses were built, and things were put in order."

It was the marvellous achievement of the Poet and others who worked in Surul that they wiped out the disease of malaria from Surul and the neighbouring villages. Malaria is really the gravest of all agricultural issues in a large area of India today. With millions of deaths every year from malaria, and tenfold that number of diseased human beings leading an enfeebled existence, how can India be happy or prosperous? It has been reckoned that as many as one in every four of the Indian population is thus debilitated.

The Poet laid great stress on his work, at Surul, being regarded as a laboratory, where they had to try out experiments in rural reconstruction on an intensive scale. They also had a medical co-operative work and experienced the same amount of success as in the malarial research. The whole village was united in a co-operative plan, admirably conducted, which gave them a doctor of their own who might be called in at any time of serious illness, and who looked after the health of the whole village.

The co-operative plan was also introduced with regard to the primary education and boy scout organisation. Through the enthusiasm of the children themselves, new life and energy was flowing back to revive the villages.

Today after a lapse of thirty years we see Sriniketan a very big institute and an ideal for the motherland. The institute consists of the following departments working in a constructive way:

I. Village Welfare Department
   (*a*) Agricultural improvement with the help of the central farm at Sriniketan.
   (*b*) Introduction of suitable home industries, as subsidiary occupation, *e.g.*, making of palm-leaf fans and mats, spinning of *sunn*-hemp and other fibres, weaving, dairy.
   (*c*) Adult education through the circulating library, publication of bulletins in simple

Bengali, magic-lantern lectures and talks: exhibitions.

(*d*) Improvement of the village primary schools.

(*e*) Establishment of night schools for the boys and adults of working classes.

(*f*) Organisation of *Brati Balak* troops (village boy scouts).

(*g*) Recreational use of leisure time, by organising seasonal festivals, *e.g.*, *Vriksha ropan* (tree-planting), *Saradotsava* (autumn festival), *Navanna* (new harvest festival), *Jatra* and *Kavi*

(*h*) Improvement of health by organising co-operative health societies (where possible) by health education and propaganda, and by organising sanitary measures by voluntary effort.

(*i*) Organisation of co-operative societies of different types through the Visvabharati Central Co-operative Bank Limited.

(*j*) Flood and famine relief work.

II. Department of Education :

(*a*) *Sikṣha Satra* (Poet's school for village boys).

(*b*) *Siksha Charcha Bhavana* (*guru*-training school, under the Government scheme with slight modifications).

(*c*) Supervision of village schools, boy scouts and village education generally.

III. Department of Health :

(*a*) Central dispensary and clinical laboratory at Sriniketan.

(*b*) Hospital with a few beds.

(*c*) Proposed Andrews Memorial Hospital.

(*d*) Maternity and child welfare centre in charge of a lady health visitor ; *dai*-training centre.

(*e*) Co-operative health society for the villages.

IV. Women's Welfare :

(*a*) Sriniketan girls' school with two lady teachers.

(*b*) Three schools for adult women in the villages managed by lady workers.

V. Farm :
(*a*) Farm proper for experiment and demonstration.
(*b*) Nursery.
(*c*) Orchard.
(*d*) Experiment in anti-soil-erosion.
(*e*) Experiment in afforestation.
(*f*) Dairy with Sind cattle.
(*g*) Fodder farm.
(*h*) Bee-keeping.
(*i*) Pisciculture.

VI. *Silpa Bhavana* (Department of Organised Village and Cottage Industries) :
(*a*) Carpentry.
(*b*) Weaving.
(*c*) Carpet-making.
(*d*) Leather craft and shoe-making.
(*e*) Bookbinding.
(*f*) Lacquer work.
(*g*) Pottery.
(*h*) Fruit preserves.
(*i*) *Batik* (artistic dyeing of silk introduced from Java-Bali).

VII. Department of Socio-Economic Survey Research :
Several bulletins have been published and some are under preparation.

VIII. The Visvabharati Central Cooperative Bank Limited.

VI

THE TWO ANGELS OF PEACE

Two sons of Mother India, more than any others, have raised her dignity and status in the eyes of the world, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. The British connexion may have brought railways and telegraphs to this ancient land but the impression left abroad was that India was a land of cobras and semi-savages and hot as Turkish Bath. Those who affected a higher pose enquired about fakirs and talked of the mango tree or rope tricks. Jagdish Bose, Prafulla Ray and Raman attained fame in the limited sphere of science but Tagore the Poet and Gandhi the Mystic carried India forward at one bound and placed her along with others in the vanguard of world culture and civilisation.

—ABDUR RAHMAN SIDDIQI

TAGORE and Gandhi are the two counterparts of the "New Life Movement" in India. The one thinks. The other acts. Thus they move forward the two wheels of the golden chariot of idealism. The poetry of Tagore has a spark of shrewd statesmanship. The statesmanship of Gandhi has a music of sublime poetry. Combining idealism and practicability, none of them is a glorifier of the past. If Tagore was a mystic, his mysticism is deeply hued in the realities of a hard mechanical age. If Gandhi is a Christ, he is essentially a Christ of the twentieth century. Each of them lives in the present as a soldier of eternity. With eyes fixed in the distant horizon, they do not trail behind looking backwards. With a set face, they gaze at the Pole Star of permanent peace and prosperity for the world. They alone can pilot the shipwrecked humanity.

Words can be things of power. Our scriptures talk of a time when words had magic. The ancient

mantrams were just words but words with this magic. Men perfected through discipline uttered these *mantrams*. It was the ancient Wisdom. The *rishis* opened their mouths and spoke. In the world of our ancient scriptures, the elements obeyed. The tempest ceased. The seas calmed. The very dead awoke. From the *tapovanas* hid in the heart of forests, words leapt forth, words of flame, words of light. The words that come out of the burning heart of a mother, do not the hardest quail before them? Indian philosophy recognises the force of *prana*. Whenever words come charged with *prana* they are things of power indeed.

As the words pour forth, rising and falling, the listeners sometimes gasp for breath. They are lulled into dumb fascination. The speaker becomes the master of the moment, the potent charmer. His words become symbols of power. When a people are in despair, great words spoken greatly can put new life into hearts that droop. They mould into dynamic forces of action, weaklings and cowards. When the orator opens his mouth, chooses his words, and wings them with the flame, hearts are flung about. Dead and drooping things leap into life. But the oratorical word with its particular mould and the magic are rather passing things. They are quickly put out. When the voice becomes hushed they cease to burn. In the moment of glow great movements of emotion might be started. They pass like a summer storm.

But there are words which find a different rhythm. These constitute the poetic word. The poetic word, when it is truest, is the Soul-word.

The poetic word seeks its own rhythm, mould, and music. The poetic word has its moods and moments of vision in the human soul. The poetic word is generally the vessel holding some aspect of reality glimpsed during fleeting moments. It is like a coloured crystal bowl that holds fresh water. The liquid borrows the colour of the bowl and assumes a new beauty. The bowl without the liquid should have

had to endure the cold dignity of emptiness. Thus poetry is a creation of enchantment. Out of nothing spring the currents of emotion that lash us to ceaseless activity in mind and matter.

All poetry is written on the Mount of Transfiguration. There is revelation in it. It is the mingling of Heaven and Earth. The poet becomes in the moment of creation an instrument for the expression of the highest visions. To arrive at truth the seeker must become profoundly impersonal. None can become absolutely detached but the poetic mood is perhaps the nearest example. But to the poet the objective world acts merely as a stimulus and not as a bondage. If the objective world assumes undue importance, the fountain of the poetic world begins to dry up. The poetic mood refuses to be drawn into the bondage of the objective world. It has its supreme offering to the highest needs of the human spirit. This offering is the Soul-word.

The Soul-word energises into eternal life the visions of Reality. And the poet is he who can sing. Others too might see kindred visions but their mood is not the mood of the poet. They let them go, and are not vitally affected The poet's genius tends in a different manner altogether. He weaves around the vision the exquisite web of his art. He seeks to hold the vision in this web.

Tagore, unlike Mahatma Gandhi, does not fill his head with politics. Politics is a devil's game. It is a dull amusement in the doing. "Mr. Tagore, like the Indian civilisation itself, has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity." His poetry has a deep touch of innocence and simplicity. Birds and leaves are as near to Tagore as they are to children. And this quality again we find in Gandhi. Gandhi is happy with children and children are happy with Gandhi.

The utter misery of the poor, their tragic loneliness, touch the mind of the poet into life. The poet loses himself in his contemplation. He broods upon this tragedy. His mind becomes a burning

thing. And then slowly there dawns in his mind a vision. The God of his passionate imagination is there among these despised ones clothed as one of them. He is their friend, their guide, their comrade The heart of the poet rejoices. God is great. An irresistible impulse of adoration takes hold of him. He must needs bow and touch God's feet. This is the vision. It is held in the exquisite web of the Soul-word. We who know the Soul-word can thrill with the poet. And throb to his vision.

The world of objective reality cannot catch the poet so easily. The poet just eludes its grip. He flings in its face the poetic word. But the *karmayogin* passes through fire and flood. The path of his expression becomes the Soul-deed.

The Soul-word and the Soul-deed are fruits of the same spiritual mood. The same spiritual experience strikes different notes on their minds. The harmony of the Soul-word produces the heroism of the Soul-deed. The difference is not that while the one acts the other lives in a state of poetic inaction. Soul-word of the poet-seer is as much an action, as the concrete labour. Only, the poet acts in a finer plane of human emotions. Rabindranath stands for the Soul-word. Gandhi stands for the Soul-deed. Tagore is the Poet Laureate of Asia. The great thinker has offered to awakening India some of the most concrete ideals. He is the servant of humanity. He claims his place in the ranks of the toilers of the earth. Sriniketan endeavours to reconstruct the shattered life of the villager. It is the creation of the very mind from which have flowed the melodies of the *Gitanjali*. Mahatma Gandhi is great not merely in the field of action. He has his place in the realm of thought and imagination. He too has dreamt a great white dream of love, compassion, and beauty. He has created ideals that stir us to the depths of our being. These ideals call us out of our little narrow lives into the vast world of promise and adventure.

When Tagore enters the world of Gandhi he sees

spinning wheels and carding bows. The one humming and the other thrumming. He watches the workers, clothed in raiment looking like gunny bags. He intellectually grasps the fact that all these are inspired by love and compassion. He yet asks himself in bewildered anxiety whether this world with its round of labour can compare with his own radiant world of movement and music. There God daily paints the skies with silver and gold. The very leaves murmur love-songs. Gandhi has disciplined his senses. He has brought his volcanic impulses under the control of a searching intellect and an iron will. As he enters the world of Tagore, he cannot help asking what possibly could be the meaning of this riot of colours? Out in the wide world men are dying of hunger. Darkness is creeping into the cottages of the poor, and even into their souls.

The mind of Gandhi does not give free scope for the aesthetic impulses. He does not wander after the lotus-feet of Beauty.

In an article written in answer to the Poet's criticism of the *charkha*, Gandhi wrote referring obviously to the Poet:

"The world easily finds a place of honour for the magician who produces new and dazzling things."

The creations of art are not merely dazzling or glittering. There can be precious gold too in it. In fact, every great creation of art has a vital message to the human spirit. These songs, the fair blossoms of a poet's creation, have a vital value. These are as much a part of truth as acts of compassion and service. These songs too are in a sense acts of compassion. Not that Gandhi is unmoved by beauty. But beauty is only a minister to his soul. It enables him, as a friend, to go forward on his ceaseless search. But to the poet, Beauty becomes enthroned in Heaven. Gandhi, who has brought his own impulses under the control of a searching intellect and an iron will, holds that art merely dazzles. He once said to me, "The skeletons of Orissa haunt my dreams and waking hours. What will save

them is beautiful to my eyes." Here we have the foundation of even his aesthetics.

The ideal of ultimate perfection is a perfection in harmony. Life is complex. There are in it many conflicting elements. To harmonise is highest and the most alluring of ideals. None might ever have achieved. Nor found this ultimate harmony. Perhaps none ever will. But it certainly is given unto us to make our lives a dedication to that ideal. Christ has said, " Be ye perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect." It is for us to project for our guiding star, the very highest aspiration.

The mode of movement is not the same. Gandhi moves along the straight narrow path of incessant endeavour. Every endeavour leaves a transforming touch on his personality. It is a slow and toilsome march. In the case of Rabindranath, the Poet-seer, the progress is by rapid wayward movements. His poetic soul breaks out into echoes of laughter. He must feel along the bye-paths. He dare not pass by anything. He goes a certain way and then vanishes. In another mood of the soul he rises on wings of lightning. He is one with the heart of Reality.

If the philosophy of Gandhi is a popular philosophy, the poetry of Tagore is also a popular poetry. "As the generations pass," says Yeats, " travellers will hum them on the highway and men rowing upon rivers. Lovers, while they await one another, shall find, in murmuring them, this love of God a magic gulf wherein their own more bitter passion may bathe and renew its youth."

A great poet is possessed with a purpose beyond his own. He is in the grip of a great idea. He believes that he has come into the world with a mission. He feels an urge. It comes from a Higher Being. This " interior command, stronger than words " is felt by all men of genius. This realisation gives them the power to fight for an idea with a gambler's recklessness. As an egotist man is hopelessly weak. As a vehicle of mighty idea he is formidable. The same thought is expressed by Bernard Shaw in his

Man and Superman through the mouth of Don Juan. "Man, who in his own selfish affairs is a coward to the backbone, will fight for an idea like a hero." When a man imagines that he is fighting for a great idea, nothing can stop him. He would struggle against great odds. He would welcome the frown of his enemy. He would look torture face to face. He would remain unmoved when his dearest companions desert him. He would mount the scaffold with perfect nonchalance.

This heroic virtue of the soul we see in the case of Mahatma Gandhi. Nothing can shake his faith. He remains firm like a rock in his conviction amidst an encircling gloom. The agony of his soul he cannot hide. He feels lonely like a star. But however lonely the path may be, a pioneer like Gandhi must travel it alone. His soul has been wedded to the ideal of non-violence and how can he forsake it? A message from the heavens whispers to him. He keeps aloft the flag of his faith and marches on fearlessly toward the goal. And he writes: "For me non-violence is a creed. I must act up to it, whether I am alone or have companions. Since propagation of non-violence is the mission of my life, I must pursue it in all weathers." Had Gandhi been an egotist, his strength would surely have failed him. The almost inevitable tragedy was averted. He believed that he was an instrument in the hand of a Supreme Being. This faith sustained him when the horizon was the darkest. He gives expression to his belief in many of his writings. Thus he writes in *Harijan* of 28th July, 1940: "I believe that my footsteps are guided by God, and all my life is based on this belief."

The poetry of Tagore, like the Inner Voice of Gandhi, has a divine origin. Thus Tagore addresses God in *Gitanjali:*

"*When thou commandest me to sing it seems that my heart would break with pride; and I look to thy face, and tears come to my eyes.*"

Thus Tagore has never considered himself the

author of his verse, as Gandhi has never regarded himself as the author of his actions.

This faith in the existence of a God has been the main source of his strength Again and again we come across lines in Gandhiji's writings which show unmistakably that he believes in an Oversoul. It animates all his actions and has shaped all the momentous decisions of his life.

This kind of faith in some mysterious Being characterises Rabindranath's writings too. He calls this Being *Jivan Devata*, the Lord of his life. His life was a flute in the hand of a divine musician. The Lord of his life was continually shaping his being as a potter's wheel shapes the pitcher. What he felt at that supreme moment has been recorded in one of his Hibbert Lectures. There we come across the following lines : "I felt sure that some Being who comprehended me and my world was seeking his best expression in all my experiences, uniting them into an ever-widening individuality which is a spiritual work of art." Here we discover the reason why genius has been called religious by Emerson. A great poet sings what he is ordered to sing by the indwelling Deity. His pen records joyfully what is dictated to him by a spirit higher than his own. In Rabindranath's poems we find again and again the joyous recognition of a Being that is continually seeking expression through the songs of the Poet. This is the reason why we find both in the Poet and the Mahatma the same craving to reduce themselves to zero, so that they might be perfect instruments in the hand of God.

In the lowest state of life the world is made of electrons. In the highest stage of life, the whole world is made of feelings. Thus it is well known among the critics of art that poetry is a painting in words while painting is poetry in colours. Thus action and thought become one and the same on high level. If Rabindranath Tagore acts through speeches, Gandhi speaks through actions. Both are the facets of one Divine Diamond. They dip their pens in

divinity. The Hidden Voice speaks through every fibre of their frame. And it is the Voice which like electrons will one day mould itself into the Brave New World—The Kingdom Come !

VII

INDIA'S AMBASSADOR IN RUSSIA

While other imperialist powers sacrifice the welfare of the subject races to their own national greed, in the U.S.S.R. I found a genuine attempt being made to harmonise the interests of the various nationalities that are scattered over its vast area. I saw peoples and tribes who only the other day were nomadic savages being encouraged and indeed trained, to avail themselves freely of the benefits of civilisation. Enormous sums are being spent on their education to expedite the process. When I see elsewhere some two hundred nationalities - which only a few years ago were at vastly different stages of development—marching ahead in peaceful progress and amity, and when I look about my own country and see a very highly evolved and intellectual people drifting into the disorder of barbarism, I cannot help contrasting the two systems of governments, one based on co-operation, the other on exploitation, which have made such contrary conditions possible.

—RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

"RUSSIA has wrought a miracle," said Dr. Tagore in an interview given by him in America in 1930, after his visit to Russia. "I went to Moscow," he continued, "and found that the sort of instruction that the Russian peasants and workers receive does not make them merely factory hands, but develops them culturally.

"Under the Czar, the Russian masses were as ignorant and stupid as the masses of India are today. In India only seven per cent of the people are even nominally literate, not educated, just literate. Russia was no better ten years ago.

"But now I was vastly impressed by the spread of literacy and elements of true culture, the love for beauty among the humblest Russians.

"Formerly, racial and religious conflicts were common in Russia as they are in India up to this day. Now, in Russia, all these conflicts have disappeared. Jews, Armenians, Christians and Moslems have learned to co-operate.

"Of course, the Russian authorities use their educational institutions as a means to propagate their own economic and political doctrines. But with those views I have no concern. I shall not pass judgment upon economic teachings of anybody, since that is not my field.

"It is the Russian method of enlightening the people that interests me.

"Russians are not believers in old theologies. Service of mankind might be their religion."

One of the interviewers suggested that the mass education in Russia might be conducted for the purpose of propaganda and to influence their own people towards a certain system of government.

"Of course, they have their own propaganda," replied the Poet, "but that is quite natural. What must be realised is that there is a general interest in education. My object was to see the interest used in their work.

"Their education is not entirely materialistic. They are not merely making peasants into factory workers. Creative art is thriving in Russia. The theatres are crowded with people who ten years ago had no opportunity to enter them. For the first time the lower classes have been able to take advantage of what the theatres and operas offer them."

Let us think of the Bolshevik Revolution in terms of a drama. The first act was represented by the period from the establishment of the Soviet Government in November, 1917, until the declaration of the New Economic Policy, or Nep, in March, 1921, a declaration which closely coincided with the end of foreign intervention and civil war. The second act was characterised by the gradual reconstruction of the country under the compromise between socialism and capitalism which was created by the Nep. The third

act of the revolution, beginning in 1928, represented a determined effort on the part of the ruling Communist Party to cut the Gordian knot of social and economic contradictions, inherent in the Nep, by tearing out the last roots of capitalism in Russia.

When Tagore visited Russia, it was the period representing the third act. This act mainly consisted of the anti-religious demonstrations. The psychology of making a clean break with the Russian past was a very important characteristic of the Soviet regime. Such methods were adopted as had previously been considered inadvisable, *e.g.*, huge parades, holding up to mockery the objects of reverence of various faiths, public burning of icons, and so forth. To these measures there have been added the melting down of church bells and the turning of copper and bronze to industrial uses, the inauguration of systematic anti-religious teaching in the schools, the extended and intensified use of the theatre, the motion picture and the museum as media for anti-religious propaganda.

Though we have no concern to deal with religion, yet we cannot help saying that the religion of the Czar Russia was the religion of wide-spread injustice resulting in demolishing the liberty of the country. It was a religion—certainly it was—but with mere idea and no expression. The people of the Czar Russia were mostly Christians; the Bible was their holy book; what a fun it was! The teachings of Christ were honoured by them more in breach than in observance.

Russia today is free of the religious bondages. We need not discuss here whether Russia should have one religion or no, but we must not avoid saying that in spite of the Bolshevik Russia's having no belief in religion she has been appreciated for her cosmopolitan activities, as also for her efforts for imparting peace and happiness to God's world, by so many godly men like Tagore and others. She has worked wonders in removing all the ancient sources of weakness and misery, which formerly had lamed the red race and haunted it either with definite terrors or vague and scarcely conscious despond, and in bringing about a

pervading buoyancy and optimism impossible to the people if they had been again in the religious days of the Czar Russia.

"Religion is the opium of the people," said Karl Marx. Marx also said: "Destroy the social world of which religion is the spiritual aroma and you destroy religion . . . Religion is the flowers that cover the chains. Destroy the flowers and the chains will be seen." Communism is convinced of the truth of Marx's words. There have been two ideas in them. One is that if the present politico-economical system is destroyed, religion will also decay. The other is that if religion is directly attacked, it will expose the chains hidden by religion and thereby the creation of the new system will be hastened. Russian Communism has been earnestly carrying both lines of attack and this has been the significance of the Russian struggle.

Religion has often times allied itself with the powers that be, especially in the West, and especially so in Russia where the Czar was the head of both the State and the Church. Unlike India the tendency of the Czar Russia was to allow no possible liberalism in religion. Bolshevik Russia stood against such religion. She wanted to ensure equal opportunities and rights for all in the body-politic. And she had. In today Russia all have equally the blessings of life. According to some it is only an outer aspect. The life, they say, find satisfaction only in realising itself as Eternal Being. In detail we may disagree with the Communists, we sincerely want that all should have, as far as possible, equal rights and privileges in life.

Since the time the Bolsheviki seized control of the Russian State, they have never tired of putting through the most revolutionary changes in order to socialise the country and make it a fit place for the helpless masses to live in. Being strongly convinced that capitalistic countries would sooner or later meet with economic disaster because of the revolt of labour and the conflicting economic interests of nations, the Bolsheviki declared that Russia must be socialised in order to survive the approaching fall of capitalism.

With such ideas at the back of their mind, the Soviets have been busy reconstructing Russia on a communist basis. In 1921 the fifteen-year plan, fathered by Lenin, for electrification of the whole country was initiated, and also annual plans for increasing the production of the country were undertaken from 1924 to 1927 but as its programme was found to be somewhat conservative to meet the rapid development of the Soviet Union, a more revolutionary five-year plan was put into effect on the 1st of October, 1928.

The Poet arrived in Moscow on 11th September, 1930, full two years after the introduction of the five-year plan. He was accorded an enthusiastic welcome at the White-Russian baltic station by the representatives of the U.S.S.R. Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and by members of the Moscow Writers' Association.

Next day the Poet was given right royal reception at Voks (the Society for Cultural Relations). Professor F. N. Petroff, the President of the Society, regretted his inability to speak the Poet's language and said that he was very glad to welcome the Poet to their country and that it was a great inspiration to them that the Poet took such interest in their new order of civilisation in the Soviet Union.

The Poet expressed his hearty thanks to the Voks for the warm welcome given to him. He could not help expressing his admiration for Russia's courage and their keen enthusiasm to build up their social structure on an equitable basis of human freedom. It was certainly wonderful to feel, he said, that they were concerned not merely with their national interests but with the good of humanity as a whole. By offering education to vast multitudes of their people who were kept imprisoned in the darkness of ignorance, they had made an invaluable contribution to human progress. They were creating a new world of humanity and, for the first time in history, acknowledging the dignity of man in their scheme of practical work. Their first educational weapon was to launch an intensive campaign in the villages directed

to make the peasants conscious of their position, of their inherent rights which they did not enjoy, of all the possibilities that lay open to them. They were not ashamed to be propagandists ; and their propaganda was educative, it was scientific, it was human, it was moral, and carried all the fervour of social service that they were capable of igniting in their minds and hearts. Whatever they attempted to organise had always the welfare of the people as its direct inspiration. They did not want to enjoy any exclusive privilege at all, because that kind of enjoyment was anti-social and therefore non-human, perhaps even inhuman. All the store-houses of wisdom, of joy, of well-ordered social benefits were open to every one of them, because every one of them had equal human right to them.

The Poet had his Santiniketan in India which was linked up with the surrounding villages. He also had his Sriniketan (the Rural Reconstruction Institute) situated at village Surul. The inmates of Santiniketan and Sriniketan were trying their best to serve their neighbours, to invite them to their festivals, to supply them with medicine, to demonstrate to them the efficiency of the up-to-date methods of agriculture. The educational work of Russia was, therefore, of great use to the Poet. He wished he had more time and energy to study their work properly. However he tried his best to utilise his visit to Russia.

In the evening of 12th September a concert was arranged in the Poet's honour under the joint auspices of the Society for Cutural Relations and the Moscow Association of Writers. About sixty persons, representing the Soviet public life, art and science, responded to the invitation.

Professor Petroff in his opening speech of welcome said, " We, who have taken part in the October Revolution and assisted at the construction of new forms of human culture, extend a warm welcome to one who has come amongst us, as a profound thinker, to study our culture, to study our strivings for the renewal of human society and thus of human personality itself.

"Rabindranath Tagore is an active worker on the front of popular education, as well as a poet and a thinker. He is endeavouring, in the pedagogical institution founded by himself in Santiniketan, to solve problems regarding the formation of human personality. This branch of work occupies an important place in his activities and makes great demands upon his energy and strength. Now he wishes to learn of the endeavours of our country, to understand how in new and revolutionary conditions, the human personality destined to advance human progress in economic, in social and in cultural conditions which are all new, expands and formulates. Rabindranath Tagore wishes to understand how the human personality can in the conditions of socialist reconstruction perfect itself and become a veritable creator in the spheres of art, science, and in human progress of every description. We welcome the visits of friends who come with an open heart and a pure soul to our country to study our structure, to try and understand the aspirations of the masses towards a new human life, a new and free system for the perfection of human nature."

The people of Russia already knew Tagore. They had read Tagore and they loved Tagore with all their heart. They had at that time over twenty-five editions of the Poet's books and a vast majority of the numerous nationalities of the U.S.S.R. were enjoying the constructive reading from those books They were, therefore, very happy and proud to show to the Poet whatever he wanted to see of their work, and they felt sure that he would appreciate their educational activities. The Poet had gone to Russia to learn something which would, he thought, go a long way to solve the great problems of his own country as also the world problem of civilisation. Civilisation had, as it has today, taken man far away from his normal humanity. It had given birth to an extraordinary artificial life. It had created disease, evoked specific sufferings, created many anomalies.

The Poet was profoundly interested in problems of education. His idea, his dream had been to create

free human beings who should be surrounded by an environment of creative work. In Russia, the Socialist Government had put an end to the evil of human existence in a kind of cage, cut off from the rest of society. The Poet was convinced that Russia's ideas were very much like his own dream, his dream for a full life for the individual, for complete education.

The Poet's idea of education was that it should be in contact with life itself; it should be a part of life. By living a true life one can have proper education and not through the detachment from it which is so often seen in the colleges and schools in the civilised world, which the Poet would call the brick-built prisons in which children are denied the true goods of life.

The entire country is scattered with the peasants' houses. A great deal of cultural, social and educational work is carried on in these places. These houses also serve the purpose of recreation clubs. From time to time lectures are arranged to inform the masses on social and agricultural problems, to initiate them into the scientific methods of tilling the land and reaping the maximum crops. Every such house is equipped with a museum of natural history, the rise and development of religion, social and educational welfare. They are also used as information bureaux for dealing with different subjects like agriculture, taxation, education. Peasants coming from the surrounding villages with the intention of eliciting information about their own particular problems connected with the village life are allowed to stay in these houses for a few days at a nominal charge. These houses are the chief vehicle of disseminating the necessary education among the one-time illiterate peasantry and turning them into the useful and responsible citizens of Russia.

Tagore visited one such house at Moscow on 16th September. He was introduced to the peasants present there by the superintendent of the house with the remarks that the Poet had come to study their life at first hand and to learn about their way of living,

their hopes and aspirations, and he concluded his remarks with the wish that that meeting might establish a deeper contact between the peasants of the Soviet Russia and those of India.

In his reply to their address of welcome the Poet said that he was very much impressed by the kind of constructive work that was being carried on in Russia to uplift the masses from the slough of poverty, ignorance, disease and illiteracy. He admired the heroic zeal of the Soviet masses who were co-operating with the Government of their country in the uplift work.

In the course of a talk which he had with the peasants some one among them asked the Poet to account for the perpetual communal tension in India. Tagore's quick and pointed reply was that it was all due to the ignorance and illiteracy. If these were liquidated, all strife and hostilities would come to an end. However the Poet was not very hopeful about the possibilities of a mass-scale education in his country.

When another peasant asked him to express his opinion about collectivisation that was being carried on in Russia, Tagore said that he could not answer the question because he did not understand the working system of this scheme and desired that he would like to be informed from the peasants themselves about collectivisation and its bearing on the peasantry. He was told that the basic idea of collectivisation was the social voluntary participation in the organisation of these collective farms. About two hundred individuals' farms were merged into a common unit. Where about three thousand workers were putting their efforts for the common good the land was cultivated by their concerted efforts and advanced methods of agriculture such as scientific manuring and the use of tractors and other modern machinery had been introduced. There was an eight-hour working day and each fifth day was the holiday. Those peasants who worked longer received overtime allowance. When winter came, the work on the land was not sufficient to engage all the members of

a collective unit. About two-thirds of them were permitted to leave the farm and seek employment in the big cities. During their period of stay in the town they received one-third of their summer wages from the farm and their families were permitted to reside in the rooms which were allotted to them in the farms.

About fifty per cent of the Russian peasants had become the members of the collective farm before the Poet had visited Soviet Russia and the scheme was gaining popularity day by day. The Poet was informed that the collective method of land exploitation was yielding a far better and higher ratio of crops than the old individual system. The reason is not far to seek. The individuals cannot afford the modern scientific appliances nor could they utilise them in their small strips of land which each individual peasant owned. Collective farms were the source of a new order of social existence. New living houses had been built for each collective unit. There was a common dining hall and a school was attached with every unit. The peasants were glad at this change of their former small dirty huts to their large sanitary hygienic collectivist houses.

Under the collectivist social system the condition of the women was much ameliorated. They are not ignorant and helpless as is the case in India. They have received the light of the new age in order to find their place in the world of humanity. The women social workers of Russia have organised themselves into small collectivist brigades and travel in different parts of the country to rouse their sisters from their lethargy and to enlighten them about the economical and cultural benefits of collectivisation. The women collectivists worked in the land side by side their men comrades. There were in every collective farm a kindergarten, a nursery and a common kitchen. The women under the collective social system were really building up a new life in their country in which they were participating. They were no longer in the clutches of superstition and

ignorance. They had become responsible citizens with a keen sense of duty.

Tagore had taken some of his paintings with him which were displayed in the peasants' meeting. The verdict of the best critics present there was that he was the first-class artist as every picture was making a very strong impression and was thrilling the audience. He was told that his work was expressing the spirit of youth and this constituted the element of interest.

The exhibition of the pictures of the Poet was opened at the State Museum of Moscow on 17th September. It was largely attended by the public as well as the representatives of the various art and educational institutions of the country. The hall was packed to its fullest capacity on the first day of exhibition. Professor Petroff performed the opening ceremony and extended a cordial welcome on behalf of the Soviet Republic. He introduced Tagore to the audience with the words that he was not only a great poet and a philosopher but also a great painter of his age. He appreciated his vision and understanding of life's deeper realities. In conclusion he hoped that his visit to the Soviet Union would prove a new link in the chain of uniting the toiling masses of the two countries. The Poet returned warm thanks for the welcome extended to him on behalf of the State and the public and said that his pictures were the most intimate gifts that he could offer them for a true mutual understanding. He had brought his pictures to them because he hoped that through his pictures he could come into direct touch with their mind while with his words he could not owing to the linguistic barrier. He said that his pictures would speak to them without the medium of interpreter which was always unsatisfactory. His paintings won warm approval from the art critics present there. They considered those works to be a great manifestation of the aristic life.

During the remaining days of the exhibition the museum was daily visited by more than five hundred

people.

In the afternoon of 24th September the Poet visited an industrial labour commune for children and incorrigible children. There were about one hundred children who lived in the colony. Another hundred (non-residents) dined there during the day. The ages of those children ranged from fourteen to eighteen years. The idea of this labour commune was to impart industrial training to those one-time homeless waifs who had a definite tradition imbued in them of their former street life and also to mould them into honest conscientious, social workers. This commune had a self-government. All the affairs were managed by the youngsters themselves. The period of retention did not exceed three years. Each such labour commune was equipped with a school and a workshop. The children did four-hour practical work in the workshop and devoted three hours to the theoretical study in the class-room. They had their evenings entirely spare to be devoted to the social work or mental recreation. For the sake of convenience they were divided into small groups. If any of the children wanted to leave the colony to visit the town he did not require any special permit. All that he had to do was to inform about it to his squad leader. Institutions of this kind have proved very useful in winning the children back from the street.

The Poet had also the occasion to visit the central State museums for the study of the people of the U.S.S.R. These two museums are located in a big mansion which previously belonged to Catherine the Great and present the scientific and illustrated description of the ethnographical and economical region of the Soviet Union. In this connection it may be observed that there are more than one hundred and twenty nations inhabiting the jurisdiction of the Soviet Union which covered an area of one-sixth of the world.

The last big function held in connection with the Poet's visit to the Soviet Russia was a big Literature and Concert Evening which was attended by more than two thousand persons. A number of eminent

Soviet writers, poets and actors were present at the function. The famous Russian poet, Shingalee, recited his ode to Rabindranath Tagore. Several of the pieces of Tagore's poems were read out by the author Galperin. A well-known actor recited two poems 'in prose' of Tagore's works. The Poet himself read several of his poems which aroused tremendous applause from the public. An opera party gave a demonstration of Russian village dances in the satire. A peasant choir gave a recital of the Russian folk song. When the function came to a close, the Poet was given a tremendous applause as a parting act of appreciation for the Poet's versatile genius.

VIII

THE GOLDEN PATH

Ever in my life have I sought thee with my songs. It was they who led me from door to door, and with them have I felt about me, searching and touching my world.

It was my songs that taught me all the lessons I have learnt; they showed me secret paths, they brought before my sight many a star on the horizon of my heart.

They guided me all the day long to the mysteries of the country of pleasure and pain, and, at last, to what palace gate have they brought me in the evening at the end of my journey.

—*RABINDRANATH TAGORE*

THE records of the past, interpreted in practical life by noble men and women, supply the moral tonic, which must be administered to each generation lest it should perish of ethical inanition and debility. History sounds the paean of triumph of great movements in religion, politics, art and science. The self-sacrifice of the earnest lovers of humanity was the price always paid for the victory. It seems to be a mysterious law that no progress can be made without sacrifice. Some men and women must be prepared to die as martyrs or face death as heroes; to risk their lives as daring pioneers or bold heretics; to practise abnormal abstinence; to drill and discipline the body like the merciless martinets; to scorn rank and honour; to suffer hunger and thirst, cold and fatigue; to despise contumely and clumny; to renounce money and marriage; to forgo fame and fortune and family life; to endure torture and imprisonment, exile and loneli-

ness,—thus to master Sense and conquer Self, and thereby to raise the mass of mankind to ever higher levels of Wisdom and Virtue. History preserves the names and words and deeds of the most remarkable representatives of this small elite of martyrs, apostles, and amethysts whose life, as G. B. Shaw puts it, belong to the whole community and as long as they live it is their privilege to do for whatever they can. They want to be thoroughly used up when they die, for the harder they work, the more they live. Life is no "brief candle" for them. It is a sort of splendid torch which they have got hold of for the moment and they want to burn it as brightly as possible before handing on to future generations.

Nothing is more natural to man than to admire what is good and great. He is not satisfied with bread and butter, but hankers after something which will give him abiding solace and comfort. His physical nature is satisfied with material things—food, clothing, houses and riches, but his spiritual nature craves food for his mind and soul. He feels that man does not live by bread alone but by every word of God. This is why even the man rolling in the lap of luxury feels that all is not right with him and seeks for better food. This desire to bring nourishment to his soul leads men to approach and know great men. It has been said that the search of the great is the dream of youth and the most serious occupation of mankind. No nobler feeling than this of admiration for one higher than oneself dwells in the breast of man.

Whence comes this feeling—this admiration of the Great? It owes its origin to a strong innate human desire to claim kinship between man and man. More often than not do we feel that there is a common bond between the man on the pedestal and man in the street. We humans, each of us, have common frailties, common morality, common hopes and common fears. This feeling of kinship gives rise to the curiosity that goads us on to the personal qualities and idiosyncrasies of the great men and women.

As if touched by a magic wand, the man of genius

shines forth aloof from others around him, but we wish to assure ourselves that he is one of us, unlike us in some respects but very like us in others.

Death and annihilation bury all the pageant of humanity into oblivion. Most of us come into this world, live our span of existence and go from the " stage of life " quite unknown, unwept and unsung. Not a trace of us is left in this work-a-day world—nothing to identify us from the heap of cold ashes and the handful of dust. " Dust thou art and to the dust returnst," exhorts the Holy Writ.

Rarely enough from this vast mass of surging mankind is someone born to leave a trail of glory behind him, a footprint on the sands of time. Sometimes it is by virtue of a living thought that he wins the estimation of his fellow brothers, at other times he rises to eminence because of his eternal message of hope illustrated with the bitter struggles and the grim determination with which he faced the difficulties, the patience with which he ultimately triumphed. As we go through these accounts, languor and apathy vanish, a new enthusiasm comes over us and a desire to fight well the battle of life comes back. Sometimes a man of genius towers above his fellows because of creation of beauty, that never perishes, that withstands the onslaughts of time and lifts the soul of the percipient instantaneously and irresistibly out of the region of self-consciousness. There is a lot of difference between the man who leads a nameless life and goes the way of all flesh and the towering personality marked by some uncommon attribute of mind. The spoken thoughts of these great souls awaken the slumbering thoughts of others. What they say all men of that age were longing to say, but were finding no language to express and all of a sudden the thoughts of these men start up as from an enchanted sleep. The voice of the universe speaks through them. With their advent, new thoughts, new meanings, new forces float in the air. These great souls are the beacon-lights in the voyage of life ; they come to inspire, to guide and comfort us and take us to our destination. By appreciating their lives we

make our own lives sublime. They are at once our friend, philosopher and guide. They serve as pillars of light to guide us to the promised land. We in gratitude and joy say to them :

At your voice,
Panic, despair, flee away,
Ye move through the ranks, recall
The stragglers, refresh the outworn,
Praise, reinspire the brave.
Order, courage, return ;
Eyes rekindling, and prayers
Follow your steps as you go.
Ye fill up the gaps in our files,
Strengthen the wavering line,
'Stablish, continue our march,
On, to the bound of the waste,
On to the city of God.

It is because we recognise the serviceable relation of such rare souls to their age, that we have an abiding passion to probe into minutest details of their lives.

When in an age or in a country there is the tendency of men being lumped into a lifeless mass, it is the presence and worship of great men that stir it and break it up. They give a rude shaking and disintegration begins. With disintegration comes new energy and with it new life.

Such men have handed down the essence of their inspired moments to posterity and posterity shall ever build their noble ideals of life on those immortal gospels of truth. The heritage left by the great is to the young mind what the warming sun and the refreshing rain of spring are to the seeds which have lain dormant in the frosts of winter. It is more, for it may save from that which is worse than death, as well as bless us with that what is better than life. The teeming millions of Indians look up Rama as an incarnation of God and repeat his name in weal and woe as " open sesame " for deliverance from the bondage of birth and death. Yet how few of them have ever realised what a great debt of gratitude they owe to the saint who composed Ramayana—the Bible of the Hindus.

There are some heretics, as there are always are, who look upon all the principal characters of Ramayana as the " mere figment of imagination." They little feel that the whole nation regard Rama as real as the conception of a deity is in many other lands. In this great panorama of time history is a thing of yesterday and most of the memorable things took place long before the art of writing came in vogue. The Ramayana is not of an age but for all times ; it is not merely a book to be read at leisurely hours and put back on the shelf, but for aeons it has been the fountain-head of Moral Inspiration to one of the time-honoured races of the world. The living influence of this sublime epic tinged the warp and woof of an entire nation. Perhaps no other book has such power to lift the wretched out of his misery, the poor out of his poverty, to make the burden-bearer forget his burden, the down-trodden his degeneration. The characters of Rama and Sita have been the rarest literary achievement. Rama, whose divinity has never been questioned, is intensely human in his trials and tribulations. Sita, who faced a storm of an outrageous fortune, has set up an ideal for all women. Every year the Hindu India commemorates these beloved heroes by staging the passion-play of Ramayana and try to imbibe the lofty idealism and teachings of the epic. And yet how much do we know about the bard Valmiki, the creator of these immortal characters ? Besides what has been mentioned in the Ramayana itself, we do not know anything about this king among the poets of all ages. Kalidasa, the peerless poet of beauty, suffers from the same fate—oblivion. But, as says the Poet, " Beauty lives though lilies die," the man may pass away without being accorded the honour worthy of him, but his achievement, if it bears the hall-mark of immortality, will live for aye.

And hence this human and normal interest in the latest Indian Poet, whose fame pervades far and away in the entire world. No modern poet has been accorded so much honour and recognition as this Shelley of Bengal, as he was one time called. His works find

place on shelves of all cultured people and have been translated into almost all the spoken languages of the world. He has visited all the important cities of the world and has personally communicated his message in his own subtle way. His niche among the galaxy of the classical poets is already assured. And already so much has been said and written about the dignity and magnetic qualities of his personality. Apart from the unique quality of his genius, his personality makes a lasting impression on his fellow-men. Like Socrates a great man of genius may be physically unattractive but Mother Nature has been bountiful in the case of this Bengali Poet inside and out. The personality of the man is as conspicuous as genius of the poet is great. As he appeared, when the sunset of life was coming on apace, with the fine lineaments of his face and his silver locks, flowing beard and flashing eyes, he resembled an ancient seer stepping out of a sylvan glade in ancient Aryavarta, or a patriarch full of wisdom moving in the sight of God. Coleridge might have anticipated him when he uttered

Beware! beware!
Of his flashing eyes and floating hair
And weave a circle round him thrice,
For he of honey-dew hath fed
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

He was lionised even when he was just a youth of twenty with a tall stately figure and long curly hair. In the rich variety of lyrical measures, the original tunes that he constantly struck up predicted a great future for him. Babu Akshay Chandar Sirkar, a Bengali writer of no mean repute, hailed him as the precursor of a new epos in the Bengali poetry but in view of the ever-rising tide of his fame he warned him not to be intoxicated and carried away by the plaudits of the public. One may wonder what that eminent writer would have thought if he had been living today and had been an eye-witness to the world-wide homage that has been paid to this Plato of all ages. As a matter of fact, an answer to this writer was anticipated in one of the early songs of the Poet :

"Have I come into this world as a beggar for fame, to win handclaps by stringing words together? Who will awake today, who will work, who wants to wipe out the shame of the mother."

Babu Bankim Chandar Chatterjee, the celebrated Bengali novelist and the author of Bande Mataram, the Indian National Anthem, once suggested to Tagore that he should write an epic poem to establish a niche in the temple of fame in the domain of poetry. The reply came much later in the form of a beautiful address dedicated to the Lyrical Muse as his beloved:

"I had a mind to enter the list for the composition of an epic poem, but I do not know when my fancy struck your jingling bangles and broke into a thousand songs. Owing to that unexpected accident the epic poem, shattered into atoms, is lying at your feet."

In his *Reminiscences* Rabindranath mentions with characteristic modesty that he was at one time called the Shelley of Bengal. Some of his English admirers have compared him with Byron. We believe him to be greater than both—in insight, in wisdom, in *calm* vision of the Beautiful. If highest poetry is to be the emotion recollected in tranquillity, as Wordsworth says, then we may claim Tagore to be the greatest poet of all ages.

Tagore was nourished on the wisdom of the East. His poetic muse thrived on the inspiration that came to him from Upanishads and from Bengali Vaishnava poets. This wisdom of the East he interpreted in his lectures in Europe on "The Meeting of East and West" and "My Ideal of Education". The two notes of Ancient Wisdom are Human Solidarity and Supremacy of Spiritual Values. These Tagore emphasises when exposing the weaknesses of Western civilisation. Speaking to the English people he says, "When you come in contact with alien peoples, with other races, your want of love of humanity becomes apparent." Again—"Think of the ruthlessness and the commercialism present in the modern politics of Europe and America. Europe has trampled upon the vision of the Eternal and the truth of Human Fellowship. In

his *Reminiscences* Rabindranath says, "My mind refused to respond to the cheap intoxication of the political movement of those days, devoid, as they seemed, of all strength of national consciousness, with their complete ignorance of the country, their supreme indifference to real service of the motherland." Tagore's politics are the politics of Humanism, which do not exclude but enrich and deepen national patriotism. His songs to the motherland sound a new note and are a positive contribution to literature. The message of many of those poems is :

India must not lose her own self. When we imitate the Englishman or when we abuse him, when we surrender self-respect to bureaucratic threats or favours, when we confound politics of hate or passion with patriotism, when we fear to speak the truth in the face of repression, when we hesitate to have faith in ourselves and look to others to lead us out of bondage into liberty—then we are on the way to lose India's Soul !

Above the National is Universal ; Tagore's poems and his book on Nationalism (he regards it as his greatest) show that the Poet has glimpsed the beauty of the Universal. The eternal principle of his poetry is Humanity. And the ever-abiding anxiety of his heart is that India may not, in the distractions of this age, become "the Disinherited" but he recognises that India is part of the World-Movement. Tagore has had vision of the Divine Beauty of the Life of Man ; he had felt the attraction of what he has so beautifully called "the play of the World-Life." Therefore he has gone to many climes in East and West carrying everywhere the song of the Eternal he had set in his heart. voicing everywhere the message of Aryadarshana. His *Gitanjali* is charged with the profound vision and emotion of the Upanishads ; it re-sings the ancient song of life, and in a way no other poet of the present century has done.

We shall do well here to have a glance at his biographical sketch before we embark upon our task of a deeper understanding of the nature of his poetry

and art of life.

It has been said of him that the years that have brought much fame for him have also brought him a trail of sorrows and domestic bereavements. He had no share of the school and university education. The dull and trammelled life at school did not attract his sensitive nature. It was a great ordeal for him to submit to the thoughtless indiscrimination which passes for discipline. When he was untethered from the rope of school life after a brief experience, he was, to the surprise of all, a careful and diligent student, and he began composing poetry at a very early age. It is worth while to mention here the magic formula that turned him into a poet all of a sudden like the Alladin's lamp. Once when he was hardly more than eight years old, one of his cousins who was considerably older than he explained to him that if one poured words into a fourteen-syllable mould, they would condense into verse. This was the *open sesame* at which the doors of the enchanted castle of poesy flew open. In his teens he had an occasion to visit England. He penned down his English impressions into Bengali letters which were got published. These letters reflected a marvellous power of his observation of men and their ways and a lucid expression. On his return to India two things were noticeable ; he was entirely unaffected by his visit to England in his ways of living. He never put on the European costume and acquired no European habits. The other thing was that in spite of his unquestionable command over the English language and his extensive study of the English literature he seldom took to English writing. He resorted to the Bengali medium for all his literary work and everyday correspondence. It was much later that he began translating his own poems, and now by his translations, lectures and letters he occupies a unique niche among the galaxy of original English writers.

So great was his passion for literary pursuits that there is no branch of literature in which this versatile genius did not win the highest triumphs. Poetry,

drama, fiction and criticism have been enriched by his contributions, and he has shed fresh lustre upon various departments of human thoughts.

His *Perception of Life* seems to us to be deeper than that of several modern poets. Vehaneen is an eminent Belgian poet; life, according to him, is *excitement*; so it is he who sings again and again of city life, its industry, its activities, its throes of struggle, its unrest—sings of the hungering, rushing, restless, passionate man. Take Ibsen; life with him is *individuality*. Hence the idea of "freedom" in his "social dramas". But "individuality" explains as little as "excitement". Life's hidden depths are not there. Life asks of an abiding peace—*shanti* and fellowship will a World-Will. We cannot do as we like. That way lies chaos, social anarchy. Take another poet, Sundermann; his *The Joy of Living* tells with great art of a poetical club the members of which think they can transgress moral law with impunity. But, surely, the *joy of living* is not transgressing the moral law. True joy is in *dharma*, in reverence for the moral law. Think of another poet—Hauptmann. His little story of "*The Sunken Bell*" is that of an artist who leaves his family in order to live with a beautiful nymph. *Life is art*, says Hauptmann. But is that the final word of life? Communion with the beautiful is meaningless, if it cannot nourish us for fellowship with sorrow, with the poor and lowly and those who are scarred with suffering and sin. The Belgian dramatist Maeterlinck is an instance who Tagore resembles in some respects. The "*Blue Bird*" is the happiness men seek. But when we ask the question: "Where do they find happiness?" Maeterlinck gives us no definite answer. Surely life's meaning must be something deeper. The truth is, it is not *we* alone who are in quest of happiness or the Ideal; the ideal too is in quest of us—is after us, *comes* to us, again and again, if we will but open our senses and minds and hearts to receive it. "He comes, comes, ever comes," says Tagore. Man seeks God; but God also seeks Man. Our seeking was impossible with His quest, His pil-

grimage of Man. He comes into the very storm of life but with silent steps. And they that sit in the silence hear the voice that speaks beyond the walls of this world. "Through the forest path He comes," says the Poet. In the forest is silence, in the forest is the call to communion with Nature, to a life of *sadhana*, self-discipline, *tapasya*, self-purification. In the forest, the *tapovana*, is the *shantiniketan*—the abode of peace. Modern civilisation is in agony; for it has lost touch with Nature; and will not be healed of its wounds till it sings life again to Nature. Are you in quest of Happiness? Then note that to run after silver and gold and the honours of the world is to run *away* from Him; and who can be happy in running away from Him. His coming is the law which binds and builds the world. Yet we run away from Him again and again; we run away from life to take refuge in conventions and unrealities. We run away afraid to touch the Infinite in us, afraid to take up the challenge of life, anxious only to have agreeable emotions, anxious to make fools of ourselves.

From the point of view of *technique* Tagore is only an English poet by the courtesy of the freest possible interpretation of the term free verse. He does not write in lines; he writes in areas and he indulges in repeated refrains that are not in line with the practice of free verse. Moreover Tagore does not *write* his poetry; he sings his poetry; music and poetry are born together in India. In this land music has always been regarded as the greatest of the arts, and this for several reasons. Other arts are at their best when they show a *musical* quality. Coleridge remarks very pertinently that wherever you find a sentence musically worded, or true rhythm and melody in the words, there is something deep and good in the words too. For body and soul, word and idea, go strangely together here as everywhere. It is only when the heart of him is rapt into the true passion of melody and the very tones of him become musical by the greatness, depth and music of his thoughts, that we can give, him the right to rhyme and sing; that we call him a poet, and

listen to him as the Heroic of speakers, whose speech is song. "All art," says Walter Pater, the greatest writer on Western art, " constantly aspires towards the condition of music. It is the art of music which most completely realises this artistic ideal, this perfect identification of form and matter . . . Music, then, and not poetry, as is so often supposed, is the true type or measure of consummate art. Among the people of his country Tagore is as eminent as Shakespeare in his own—and more so, for while Shakespeare is a literary figure on a pedestal, Tagore is and will remain among his countrymen *a vital spiritual power*. He is to them a saint, a gurudev, an object of worship ; one of a long line of singing saints to whom realisation and wisdom and song are one ; philosopher poets to whom their philosophy was so much a thing of life, so exalted by the joy of discovery and experience, so vitalised by emotion that it was the most natural thing in life for them to express in poetry the thoughts that to them were charged with feeling and the feelings that to them were made coherent by thought." He has got down to fundamentals, to the great humanities, nay, rather to the great divinities—to those conceptions of human origin and destiny that charge the heart with a great dignity and give the thought wider horizons and an invitation uphillsides towards the stars. He does not look on life and the universe with an eye that sees only the masks of things. In addition to his singing the song of humanity in the highest, in addition to his message, he squanders the gift of beauty in phrases and images that are of the essence of poetry. The imagery of his song has the peculiar fascination of the East for the Western mind, and put into the wave-like prose-poetry of their creator, they are perfect delights of music and fancy, apart from their deep significances. The sense of freshness and revelation of *Gitanjali* is eternal because its inspiration is from the eternal rock of the spirit ; it does not ooze through the shifting sands of sensualism, or mere emotion, or blind negation. Literature in general will slowly rise towards its nobility and simplicity. Lite-

rary criticism will ultimately realise that, like the cosmic mind, it holds everything in its grasp, discarding nothing that is worthy in human experience, but dignifying all with the fulness of vision and the true perspective that is the special gift of India to English literature.

His verses will not lie in little well-printed books upon ladies' tables, who turn the pages with indolent hands that they may sigh over a life without meaning, which is yet all they can know of life, or be carried about by the students at the university to be laid aside when the work of life begins, but as the generation pass, travellers will hum them on the highway and men rowing upon rivers. Lovers, while they await one another, shall find in murmuring them, this love of God a magic gulf wherein their own more bitter passion may bathe and renew its youth. At every moment the heart of this Poet flows outward to these without derogation or condescension, for it has known that they will understand ; and it has filled itself with the circumstance of their lives. The traveller in the red-brown clothes that he wears that dust may not show upon him, the girl searching in her bed for the petals fallen from the wreath of her loyal lover, the servant or the bride awaiting the master's home-coming in the empty house, are images of the heart turning to God. Flowers and rivers, the blowing of couch shells, the heavy rain of the Indian July, or the parching heat, are images of the moods of that heart in union or in separation, and a man sitting in a boat upon a river playing upon a lute, like one of those figures full of mysterious meaning in a Chinese picture is God himself.

We had not known that we loved God hardly it may be that we believed in Him ; yet looking backward upon our life we discover, in our exploration of the pathways of woods, in our delight in the lovely places of hills, in that mysterious claim that we have made, unavailingly, on the women that we have loved, the emotion that created this insidious sweetness. "Entering my heart unhidden even as one of the

common crowd unknown to me, my king, thou didst press the signet of eternity upon many a fleeting moment."

The Poet often seems to contrast his life with the generality of people who live a crowded life—in making money and filling the heads with politics, and have more seeming weight in the world, and always humbly as though he were only sure his way is best for him : " Men going home glance at me and smile and fill me with shame. I sit like a beggar-maid, drawing my skirt over my face, and when they ask me, what it is I want, I drop my eyes and answer them not."

At another time, remembering how his life had once a different shape, he will say, " Many an hour have I spent in the strife of the good and the evil, but now it is the pleasure of my playmate of the empty days to draw my heart on to him ; and I know not why is this sudden call to what useless inconsequence." An innocence, a simplicity that one does not find elsewhere in literature, makes the birds and the leaves seem as near him as they are near to children.

Indeed, when he is speaking of children, so much a part of himself this quality seems, one is not certain that he is not also speaking of the saints, " They build their houses with sand and they play with empty shells. With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep. Children have their play on the seashore of the worlds. They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets. Pearl fishes dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets."

Tagore has familiarised us with the finest elements of Western thought, and has brought about a remarkable synthesis of the culture of the East with that of the West. This is particularly to be seen in his love poems. He has lifted love to an imaginative height hitherto undreamt of in Bengali poetry. He has caught up the far-flung radiations of the passion in the magic web of his poetry. Before him, there were certain

stereotyped moulds in which love was thrown to be treated more as convention than as an authentic experience. There was nothing to indicate that the thrill of love had ever been felt by our earlier poets. The manner in which Rabindranath transformed it and introduced into it a new fermentation, a new thrill of passion is indeed wonderful, and the credit is all the greater when we remember the trammels within which Bengali literature is bound. He is able to give expression to a range and width of feeling, a rapture and an ecstasy that seem to be quite unknown to the cramped soul of Bengal.

In poet's treatment of Beauty in the abstract he combines the spiritual quality of Shelley with the sensuous quality of Keats. The rich glow, the fine sensuousness, the concrete imagery remind us of Keats. "Urvasi" might be regarded the Rabindranath Hymn to the Abstract Spirit of Beauty—the counterpart of Shelley's Song of Asia. But the thrilling vagueness of Shelley is substituted by a sensuousness in the manner of Keats.

Rabindranath has interpreted old myths and legends endowing them with new symbolism and significance. Our old myths have become dim and vague and unsuitable to poetry, because of their dissociation with other aspects of life. It is the credit of Rabindranath that he has revived them in the light of a new interpretation in his own inimitable way. They have been lifted to higher imagination and spiritual plane. If Keats is great as a Hellenistic poet, Rabindranath also has instilled the breath of a new life over old myths.

In the rich variety of lyrical measures, the original tunes that the Poet constantly strike up, he is as great as Swinburne. He is one of the very greatest lyrical poets the world has known—lyrical in thought and lyrical in command over melodies.

Rabindranath's achievements as a great literary critic may be touched upon. He is our first and finest literary critic if we except the few tentative efforts of Babu Bankim Chandar. In fact some of the most

penetrating comments on Bankim have come from the pen of Rabindranath. There have been very few Bengali critics of outstanding ability but critical acumen has not been systematically and conscientiously cultivated. The little criticism that is to be found is either shallow or mordant which passes for smartness, or indiscriminating and fulsome adultation. When Rabindranath was a young boy criticism by comparison was rampant in Bengal and every writer of note was compared to some English writer. Early Bengali literature was neglected, the Vaishnava poems of the era of Chaitanya, the cradle and crown of the lyrical poetry of Bengal, were consigned to the oblivion of cheap and obscure printing presses. The boy Rabindranath turned to this literature with the unerring instinct of a nascent genius. As a boy-poet he wrote a number of charming poems in imitation of the language of Vidyapati under the pseudonym of Bhanu Singh and won a great recognition from the then literary critics of Bengal.

Rabindranath's short stories opened a new scope in Bengali literature. They appeal to us for their unmatched delicacy and refinement and a wonderful sense of balance and proportion. His greatness lies in his ability to strike deeper notes at a moment's notice. To discover romance in our ordinary humdrum existence is the function of a novelist, and his greatness depends on the way in which he finds out romance from the most uncompromising prose of life. He brought the Bengali novel out of the blind alley in which it was floundering by effecting a fusion between the human drama and the background of Nature. The spirit of Nature has never been more subtly transposed in the human drama than by Rabindranath. He has been compared to Wordsworth. But unlike Wordsworth, he does not follow any philosophical formula or presumption.

As the pinions of his genius grew stronger the Poet soared higher and ranged wider. The supreme art of simplicity was his to begin with, and he rapidly acquired considerable depth of thought and rare strength and

delicacy of touch. There was a very little variety in rhythm, metre and measure in Bengali poetry though the celebrated poet Madhusudhan Dutt had introduced blank verse and a few simple new metres. Rabindranath dazzled his readers by his creative faculty of introducing new metres and measures. Tripping verses nimble footed as Terpsichore, slow, dreamy measures, caught in the land of the lotus-eaters, long-swinging, stately lines of regal grace, stirring lays of knightly deeds and martyrs and heroes, lofty chants from ancient Aryan and Buddhist lore, holy hymns rising like hosannas from the shrine of the soul, all were his and his muse answered every compelling call. His language is of classical purity and dignity, and of striking originality. Critics everywhere have been struck by his wealth of simile and metaphor, the subtlety of perception and suggestion, the realisation of the beautiful. His devotional songs and poems are among the finest in the whole range of literature. They are a noble and melodious expression of a living faith beautiful in its strength and sublime in its appeal. His lyrical poems are of steadily progressive strength and variety, and the careful student can detect the suggestive development, the growing maturity of thought and expression, the increasing power over language and rhyme, and the splendid outburst of music in several of his later poems.

In the domain of poetry Rabindranath has won more laurels than any poet in his own lifetime. It is very rare that a genius receives appropriate recognition from the contemporary critics. Generally a certain perspective of time is necessary for an accurate appreciation of a great original writer or creative genius. The honour that this Indian Poet has received from his countrymen and foreigners alike is sure to withstand the test of time and will be endorsed by the posterity of critics. Rich and varied as is the output of Rabindranath's literary work, he stands pre-eminent as a lyric poet. The world of readers outside his own province of Bengal knows him only through the medium of translations. The best

translations in English are by himself and these have been translated into several other languages. Critics in Europe and America have bestowed high praise on his writings and ranked him among the great poets of the world. Poetry divides itself easily into three main sections, epic, dramatic and lyric, the three clearly demarcated and separated by wide stretches of time and the evolution of the human intellect. Of these epic poetry is somewhat easy of translation but its essence is narrative. Drama is comparatively difficult but the excellent renderings into English of the powerful tragedies prove that the difficulties of translation, after all, are not insuperable. A fine lyrical poem is the despair of the translation. To be fully appreciated a lyrical poem must be read in the original with due understanding of the language in which it is written. It is a compact and a component whole from which no part can be separated from another. The words, the figures, the metre are all wedded together. Rabindranath has translated his poems with a phenomenal success but still it is impossible to convey in another language the grace, the metrical arrangement and the musical harmony of the words of the original poems. Several English admirers of the Poet, also hundreds of Indian readers outside Bengal, have learnt the language of Bengal to read the works of the Bengali Poet as originally written. The late Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the well-known Indian politician and mathematician, also learnt the Bengali language for the express purpose of reading Rabindranath's poems in the original Bengali.

An English critic of Tagore has likened him to Victor Hugo. Comparisons between two writers in two different languages are often not helpful for constructive criticism. At times it may have the merit of suggestion. The similarity between the French and the Indian writers is in their versatility and range of creative genius. Both are masters of prose and verse, both are writers of prose fiction, both have written dramatic and lyrical poetry, both are child-lovers and have tendered the homage of exquisite

song to the sovereignty of childhood. But the students of literature will not fail to observe that the two writers belong to two divergent schools. Tennyson has rightly called Victor Hugo 'Stormy Voice of France.' The great French poet was 'Lord of human tears'. The muse of the Indian Poet moves in the glory of early dawn and seeks the gathering shadows of evening. She finds her pleasure not in the storm and stress but in the smiling beauties of Nature. She listens to the voice of the sandal-scented wind from the south and knocks gently at the door of the human heart. The genius of Victor Hugo was not only dramatic but even melodramatic. He was a master of the big bow-wow style. Rabindranath in his later writings has touched spiritual heights seldom reached by any poet.

No estimate of Rabindranath's life and works would be complete without touching upon his philosophy of the Infinite. The Poet never loses sight of the Infinite in the finite, the Unlimited in the limited. This is interwoven in the warp and woof of his writings.

In his famous novel *Gora*, he makes Gora, the hero of the piece, speak thus :

"Unless there be finite, the Infinite cannot express itself. It is through the finite that the Infinite manifests itself."

Again in another passage the Poet sings :

"Within the finite Oh Thou Infinite, Thou playest Thy own tune. Hence, so rapturously sweet is Thy manifestation in me."

The Poet has found in *music* the manifestation of the Infinite through the finite. The passage last quoted is an illustration in his masterpiece, *Chitrangada*:

"As in a song, in a momentary rhythm, there is as if, a mystical echo from the Eternal."

There is a parallel idea in another of his songs :

"The mind cannot approach Him. But music soars higher and kisses His throne."

This is the Poet's faith in music which brings him such a beatific vision as we see in the following :

Oh how perfect is Thy music, my Master.
It makes me listen in silent amazement.
The light of Thy music illumines the world,
The music of Thy notes flows through the heavens.
It rushes madly breaking through the rocks
Like unto the sacred river eager to mingle in the ocean."

There is yet another symbol in his poems which may be regarded as the symbol of *rhythm*. Sings he:

"My thoughts are quickened by this rhythm of unseen feet round which the ankles of light are shaken.

"They echo in the pulse of my heart, and through my blood surges the psalm of the ancient sea."

Or this—

"When thou and I come face to face
All veils drop,
And the sea of the universe ripples in sympathy."

Or this—

"In the cadence of making and breaking
Your love trips along
From land to land,
From age to age."

In all of these three symbols of imageries—song, movement and rhythm—the Poet has tried to describe the play of the Infinite through the finite, which is the keynote of his philosophy.

As the Poet has expressly stated in some of his poems, his path to vision of truth or eternal search for the Infinite is not through renunciation but through joyful acceptance. He joyfully accepts the world, with all its light and shadows, its pleasures and sorrows, its separations and its reconciliations, its beauties as well as its terrors. So much beauty, so much joy, he says again and again, could not prevail in the world, if God wanted us to reject them. No, says he, I renounce nothing. The world is mine to love and to enjoy and is not the world God's too? And is not God in the universe and can the Creator be contemplated apart from His creation? But the Creator and the creation would be meaningless without

my " I " too, for here He is in the heart of my heart, in the soul of my soul. I am not apart from creation, yet I have the creation as the object of my experience and I and the creation form One whole, which together make up the totality, the One without a second and that is God. So the limited and the limitless, the *personal* and the *universal* have to meet, and as a matter of fact they do meet every moment of our daily life and God is in it, of it, the essence of it. Rabindranath has expressed it—"As speech is filled with thought, so every object with form is replete with that which is formless." In other words there is a communion of the Divine and the Universe or the manifestation of the Infinite through the finite.

Rabindranath has tried to describe by way of symbol the manifestation of God in the universe which is a mystical experience with him. In *The Tryst* he sings :

" The buds were falling fast,
The cuckoo was singing overhead,
The moonlight was intoxicating.
' Who are you, kind sir,' cried the poor woman.
' The time has come tonight,' replied the hermit,
' I have come, Visava Datta'."

In the threefold symbol or imagery, the dropping of blossoms indicates rhythm, the singing of cuckoo indicates song, and the shining of the full moon, movement. The idea of the divine communion is symbolised in a pre-eminent degree in song, the tune as apart from the words. While the words are limited and particular, the tune, it seems to him, goes beyond and vividly brings home the eternal character of experience, and that is why he has said again and again, he looks upon song as the type of mystic experience, a sudden breaking of the bonds, a glimpse of the eternal in everyday life.