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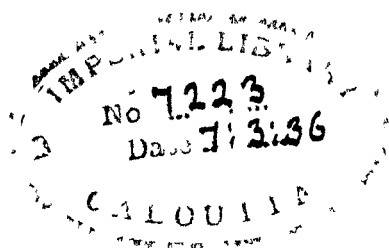
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1935

EAST AND WEST

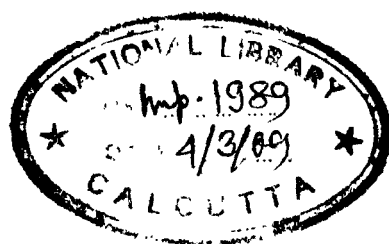
GILBERT MURRAY and RABINDRANATH TAGORE

EAST AND WEST



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF INTELLECTUAL CO-OPERATION
LEAGUE OF NATIONS

1935



GILBERT MURRAY

Yatscombe, Boar's Hill, Oxford,
August 17th, 1934.

My dear Tagore,

I venture to trouble you with this letter for several reasons. First, you are a great poet, probably the most famous poet now living in the world, and poetry is to me almost the chief pleasure and interest in life. Your life and work are inspired by a spirit of harmony, and it is in the interest of harmony between man and man that I make my appeal. You are a Thinker, and in this distracted world, where nation stands

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armed against nation and the old liberal statesmanship of the nineteenth century seems to have given way to a blind temper of competition, I cannot but look to the Thinkers of the world to stand together, not in one nation but in all nations, reminding all who care to listen of the reality of human brotherhood and the impossibility of basing a durable civilized society on any foundation save peace and the will to act justly.

All generalizations about whole nations or groups of nations are superficial and inaccurate, even when made by scientific students without personal bias. And most of these actually current are made by prejudiced and utterly unscientific partisans. People talk loosely of the difference in character between "Nordic" and "Latin" nations, or, in still looser phrase,

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between "East" and "West", violently denouncing the one and praising the other. Even when there is no actual prejudice at work, the comparisons, though sometimes suggestive, are never exact. For one thing, neither side of the comparison is uniform : every German is different from every other German, every Italian from every other Italian : nor can you make any single statement that will be true of all Indians or of all Englishmen. And besides, the differences of habits and ways of thought between, say, one fairly typical Bengali and one typical Yorkshireman, are so infinite in number that they cannot be added together in a definite catalogue, and for the most part so utterly unimportant that they would not be worth cataloguing. I am always puzzled by the people who ask me "Do

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I like Indians", or it may be Americans, or Frenchmen : and can only answer, as I would about my own countrymen, that I like some and do not like others.

Yet the differences are there, and are felt though they cannot be analyzed. Indeed the mischief is that they are felt far too much ; infinitesimal peculiarities are noted and interpreted as having some great moral significance. We are accustomed to our own people and do not seek for profound psychological explanations of their chance looks and ways. But when we meet a foreigner we feel a surge of curiosity and criticism rising within us. We want eagerly to know what this strange being is really like, and we have so little evidence to go upon that we exaggerate the importance of all we have. A slightly louder voice, a less ceremonious

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address, a ruddier face, will suggest insolence and brutality : the opposite will seem to be symptoms of timidity and insincerity. Similarly, an act of courtesy to which we are not accustomed will be gratefully remembered for years ; a breach of the sort of courtesy which we expect will be furiously resented. And, inevitably when this course of ingenious misinterpretation is once begun, it is easy to get abundant confirmation of all one's prejudices. It is said to be, in point of law, impossible to draw an indictment against a nation : as a matter of literature, it is only too easy. One could write a "Mother India" about every nation—an appalling indictment, and false as a whole, while every statement in it might be true. I remember an English newspaper in the 90's which, finding nothing

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more mischievous to do at the moment, used to collect and publish a list of all the crimes committed by members of the French army. And since the French army was very large the crimes were proportionately numerous, and the effect as horrifying as the editor desired. Many of us read a famous German scholar's book, "England", published during the war. It dwelt upon the disgusting faults of the English and the merits of the writer's own countrymen, and perhaps, in the long run, it was as useful to us as it was harmful to them. But of course the whole method of such books is wrong. The first step towards international understanding must be a recognition that our own national habits are not the unfailing canon by which those of other peoples must be judged, and that the beginning

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of all improvement must be a certain reasonable humility.

It is not hard, in theory at least, to make this first step. Indeed it is a duty generally recognised by English Liberals. The historical works of my friend, Edward Thompson, on Indian subjects are an example. But it is hard indeed to carry out consistently, and even to begin needs some imaginative effort.

An Indian friend of mine once told me that as a small child he had been taught to regard the Englishman as something scarcely human, a kind of Demon, which had every day both to shed blood and be drugged with alcohol, or else its rage became terrible. This, I suppose, was strictly true, at any rate of some average British officers on a hunting expedition. They did expect every day to shed

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blood and to cheer themselves with alcohol—two acts which to my Indian friend were equally abominable; and I can quite believe that their tempers wore rather thin when they were disappointed of either. Yet no doubt, apart from this little weakness for blood and alcohol, they were excellent people.

I remember many years ago a visit of yours to England, when a number of people met to give you a public welcome in some hall in London, and, among other features in the entertainment, an English singer sang one of your poems. It was a gentle philosophical poem, dependent for its whole effect upon a spirit of quiet and calm. I should have liked to hear it spoken to the accompaniment of some antique stringed instrument like a harp or a cithara. But on this occasion

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it had been set to modern European music of a *bravura* style, and when the singer began, her piercing soprano made me wince. I looked to see how you were bearing it. No doubt you suffered, but you were the centre of all eyes and your statuesque courtesy was undisturbed.

Yes, the differences are there : they are real and perhaps to a certain extent they are national or racial, though not so much as people imagine. I was once on a Committee where a certain Indian member was making himself very tiresome (there are tiresome Indians as well as tiresome Europeans) by his touchiness and vanity. And a wise old Japanese friend of mine told me afterwards how he had wondered within himself : "Is that sort of behaviour Asiatic, and ought I to feel ashamed ? Or is it Indo-Euro-

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pean, so that I am left untouched ?” Of course it was neither. It was only human. There are touchy and vain people in all parts of the world, just as there are criminals in all parts ; just as there are thinkers, artists, poets, men of learning ; just as there are saints and sages. And it is valuable to remember that, as Plato pointed out long ago, while criminals tend to cheat and fight one another, and stupid people to misunderstand one another, there is a certain germ of mutual sympathy between people of good will or good intelligence. An artist cannot help liking good art, a poet good poetry, a man of science good scientific work, from whatever country it may spring. And that common love of beauty or truth, a spirit indifferent to races and frontiers, ought, among all the political

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discords and antagonisms of the world, to be a steady well-spring of good understanding, a permanent agency of union and brotherhood.

There is no need for sentimentality, no need for pretence. If I enjoy the beauty of your poetry, if I sympathize with your rejection of honours from a government which you had ceased to respect, that makes already a sufficient bond between us : there is no need for me to share, or pretend to share, or make a great effort to share, your views on every subject, or because I admire certain things that are Indian to turn round and denounce Western Civilization. Men of imagination appreciate what is different from themselves : that is the great power which imagination gives. For example, I have just been reading your

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play called in French "La Machine", and see in it, if I am not mistaken, your hatred of machines as such, and of all the mechanization of modern life. Now I happen to admire machines and the engineers who make them. I respect their educational influence. I feel that if a boy's horse or dog will not do what he wants he will probably try to make it do so by losing his temper and beating it ; but if his bicycle or his wireless will not work, he knows it is no good losing his temper. He has to think and work, to find out what is wrong and to put it right : which is a priceless lesson for any boy. Then the use of machinery teaches conscientiousness to the mechanic. I often think of the thousands and thousands of aeroplanes that are plying their daily tasks throughout Europe and Amer-

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ica ; each one of them consisting of thousands and thousands of parts, every single one of which must be properly adjusted and made fast by the workmen before the machine starts. A mistake, almost any mistake, is quite likely to be fatal. But the engineers, quite ordinary men for the most part, are so trained that they do not make a mistake, and the rest of us have such confidence in their accuracy and conscientiousness that we travel in their aeroplanes freely and without a qualm. This seems to me a quite wonderful fact, that masses of men should have been made so trustworthy and reliable. It is the Age of Machines that, for the first time in history, has made them so. I write this not to argue but merely to illustrate ; to show that difference of opinion, habit or training need not cause

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alienation. You can remain profoundly Indian and I a regular westerner, without disturbance to our mutual sympathy.

I even believe in the healthiness and high moral quality of our poor distressed civilization. It made the most ghastly war in history, but it hated itself for doing so. As a result of the war it is now full of oppressions, cruelties, stupidities and public delusions of a kind which were thought to be obsolete and for ever discarded a century ago. But I doubt if ever before there was what theologians would call such a general sense of sin, such widespread consciousness of the folly and wickedness in which most nations and governments are involved, or such a determined effort, in spite of failure after failure, to get rid at last of war and the fear of war and all the

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baseness and savagery which that fear engenders. I still have hope for the future of this tortured and criminal generation : perhaps you have lost hope and perhaps you will prove right. But the divergence of view need make no rift between us.

My beloved and admired colleague, Mme Curie, when she threw herself into the work of Intellectual Co-operation, gave one special reason for doing so. She had seen, during the World War, how often the intellectual leaders in the various nations had been not better but, if anything, worse than the common people in the bitterness and injustice of their feelings. She had seen that this was a great evil and one that could be remedied. The artists and thinkers, the people whose work or whose words move

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multitudes, ought to know one another, to understand one another, to work together at the formation of some great League of Mind or Thought independent of miserable frontiers and tariffs and governmental follies, a League or Society of those who live the life of the intellect and through the diverse channels of art or science aim at the attainment of beauty, truth and human brotherhood.

I need not appeal to you, Tagore, to join in this quest ; you already belong to it ; you are inevitably one of its great leaders. I only ask you to recognize the greatness of your own work for the intellectual union of East and West, of thinker with thinker and poet with poet, and to appreciate the work that may be done by the intellectuals of India not merely for their own national aims, how-

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ever just and reasonable they may be; there is a higher task to be attempted in healing the discords of the political and material world by the magic of that inward community of spiritual life which even amid our worst failures reveals to us Children of Men our brotherhood and our high destiny.

Believe me, with deep respect,

Yours sincerely,

GILBERT MURRAY.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

“Uttarayan” Santiniketan, Bengal.
September 16th, 1934.

My dear Professor Murray.

IN the midst of my busy seclusion in a corner of this Educational Colony in India comes your letter bearing its call for close understanding of the problems that face our common humanity. I have no difficulty in responding to your friendly voice, for it is not only the voice of a friend whom I have the privilege to know and love ; but it also carries the highest authority of European culture and scholarship, and is there-

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fore eminently fitted to represent the great humanity of Europe.

I must confess at once that I do not see any solution of the intricate evils of disharmonious relationship between nations, nor can I point out any path which may lead us immediately to the levels of sanity. Like yourself, I find much that is deeply distressing in modern conditions, and I am in complete agreement with you again in believing that at no other period of history has mankind as a whole been more alive to the need of human co-operation, more conscious of the inevitable and inescapable moral links which hold together the fabric of human civilization. I cannot afford to lose my faith in this inner spirit of Man, nor in the sureness of human progress which following the upward path of struggle

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and travail is constantly achieving, through cyclic darkness and doubt, its ever-widening ranges of fulfilment. Willingly therefore I harness myself, in my advanced age, to the arduous responsibility of creating in our Educational Colony in Santiniketan a spirit of genuine international collaboration based on a definite pursuit of knowledge, a pursuit carried on in an atmosphere of friendly community life, harmonized with Nature, and offering freedom of individual self-expression. This work which I have to continue in the face of desperately adverse circumstance, has yet struck root in the soil of India, and sent out its branches to a wider arena of humanity, and it carries, I believe, a very deep affinity with the activities of the League of Intellectual Co-operation with which I am already associated.

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My occasional misgivings about the modern pursuit of Science is directed not against Science, for Science itself can be neither good or evil, but its wrong use. If I may just touch here on your reference to machines, I would say that machines should not be allowed to mechanize human life but contribute to its wellbeing, which as you rightly point out, it is constantly doing when it is man's sanity which controls the use of machinery.

I would like here to quote a passage from one of my writings published in April 1929 which I think may interest you. You will find that it is impossible for me not to accept the true spirit of Science as a pure expression of the creative soul of man.

“Personally I do not believe that Europe is occupied only with material things.

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She may have lost her faith in religion, but not in humanity. Man, in his essential nature, is spiritual and can never remain solely material. If, however, we in the East merely realize Europe in this external aspect, we shall be seriously at fault. For in Europe the ideals of human activity are truly of the soul. They are not paralyzed by shackles of scriptural injunctions. Their sanction lies in the heart of man and not in something external to him.

“It is this attitude of mind in Europe which is essentially spiritual

“When the aeroplane goes up in the sky, we may wonder at it as the perfection of material power ; but behind this lies the human spirit, strong and alive. It is this spirit of man which has refused to recognize the boundaries of nature

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as final. Nature has put the fear of death in man's mind to moderate his power within the limits of safety ; but man in Europe has snapped his fingers at Death and torn asunder the bonds. Only then did he earn the right to fly—a right of the gods.

“But even here the adverse forces—the Titans—are alive, who are ready to rain down death from the air. But the Titans are not in sole possession. In Europe, there is a constant war between the gods and the Titans. Often the Titans are victorious ; but the victory is sometimes with the gods”

What really must concern us in our generalization or in our detailed study of truth is, as you indicate, a sincere recognition of reality and an unflinching loyalty to it.

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May I therefore, in trying to pursue the middle path of harmony, deal with some details of our present problems of India, and also put them in relation to the larger aspect of international relationship as I view it. In offering you gleanings from my thoughts covering a number of my mature years of experience, I may perhaps help in clearing up, to a certain extent, the nature of some of our vital problems. On the clear recognition of these internal as well as international problems must depend the possibility of genuine understanding and co-operation both between the different communities of India and between India as a whole and Europe. This, I believe, is also the guiding principle of the League of Nations which has asserted itself time and again in spite of the pressure of political vicissitudes.

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Now that mutual intercourse has become easy, and the different peoples and nations of the world have come to know one another in various relations, one might have thought that the time had arrived to merge their differences in a common unity. But the significant thing is, that the more the doors are opening and the walls breaking down outwardly, the greater is the force which the consciousness of individual distinction is gaining within. There was a time when we believed that men were remaining separate, because of the obstacles between them ; but the removal of these, to the largest possible extent, is not seen to have the effect of doing away with the

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differences between diverse sections of mankind.

Individuality is precious, because only through it we can realize the universal. Unfortunately there are people who take enormous pride in magnifying their speciality and proclaiming to the world that they are fixed for ever on their pedestal of uniqueness. They forget that only discords are unique and therefore can claim their own separate place outside the universal world of music.

It should be the function of religion to provide us with this universal ideal of truth and maintain it in its purity. But men have often made perverse use of their religion, building with it permanent walls to ensure their own separateness. Christianity, when it minimises its spiritual truth, which is universal,

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and emphasises its dogmatic side, which is a mere accretion of time, has the same effect of creating a mental obstruction which leads to the misunderstanding of people who are outside its pale. A great deal of the unmerited contempt and cruelty, which the non-western peoples have suffered in their political, commercial or other relations at the hands of the West, is owing to sectarian calumnies with which even the western children's text books are contaminated. Nevertheless this sectarian religion does not occupy the greater part of the western life and therefore in its heart still remains the possibility of a better human relationship than what prevails now between the races.

We have seen Europe cruelly unscrupulous in its politics and commerce, widely

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spreading slavery over the face of the earth in various names and forms. And yet, in this very same Europe, protest is always alive against its own iniquities. Martyrs are never absent whose lives of sacrifice are the penance for the wrongs done by their own kindred. The individuality which is western is not to be designated by any sect-name of a particular religion, but is distinguished by its eager attitude towards truth, in two of its aspects, scientific and humanistic. This openness of mind to truth has also its moral value and so in the West it has often been noticed that, while those who are professedly pious have sided with tyrannical power, encouraging repression of freedom, the men of intellect, the sceptics, have bravely stood for justice and the rights of man.

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I do not mean to say that those who seek truth always find truth, and we know that men in the West are apt to borrow the sanction of science under false pretences to give expression to their passions and prejudices. To many thinkers there has appeared a clear connection between Darwin's theories and the "imperialism", Teutonic and other, which was so marked a feature during the sixties. We have also read western authors who, admirably mimicking scientific mannerism, assert, as you point out, that only the so-called Nordic race has the proper quality and therefore the right to rule the world, extolling its characteristic ruthlessness as giving it the claim to universal dominance. But we must not forget that such aberrations of science, padded with wrong or imperfect data, will be knocked

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down by science itself. The stream of water in a river does carry sand, but so long as the stream can still flow it will push away the sand from its own path. If the mental attitude is right we need not be afraid of mistakes. That is why the individual in the West has no unsurpassable barrier between himself and the rest of humanity. He may have his prejudices, but no irrational injunctions to keep him in internment away from the wide world of men.

Unfortunately for us, however, the one outstanding visible relationship of Europe with Asia today is that of exploitation ; in other words, its origins are commercial and material. It is physical strength that is most apparent to us in Europe's enormous dominion and commerce, illimitable in its extent and immeasurable

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in its appetite. Our spirit sickens at it. Everywhere we come against barriers in the way of direct human kinship. The harshness of these external contacts is galling, and therefore the feeling of unrest ever grows more oppressive. There is no people in the whole of Asia today which does not look upon Europe with fear and suspicion.

There was a time when we were fascinated by Europe. She had inspired us with a new hope. We believed that her chief mission was to preach the gospel of liberty to the world. We had come then to know only her ideal side through her literature and art. But slowly, Asia and Africa have become the main spheres of Europe's secular activities, where her chief preoccupations have been the earning of dividends, the administration of

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empires, and the extension of commerce.

Europe's warehouses and business offices, her police outposts and soldiers' barracks, have been multiplied, while her human relationships have declined.

Towards those who are being exploited, there always is wont to grow up a feeling of contempt. For exploitation itself becomes easier, if we can succeed in creating a callousness towards those who are its victims. Just as whenever we go out fishing we are inclined to regard fishes as the least sensitive of all living creatures, so it becomes quite pleasant to loot the Orient, if only we can make our own moral justification easy by relegating coloured races to the lowest groupings of mankind.

Thus modern Europe, scientific and puissant, has portioned out this wide

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earth into two divisions. Through her filter, whatever is finest in Europe cannot pass through to reach us in the East. In our traffic with her, we have learnt, as the biggest fact of all, that she is efficient, terribly efficient. We may feel astounded by this efficiency ; but if, through fear, we bring to it our homage of respect, then we ourselves need to realize that we are fast going down to the very depths of misfortune ; for to do such homage is like the crude barbarity of bringing sacrificial offerings to some god which thirsts for blood. It is on account of this fact, and in order to retain her self-respect, that the whole of Asia today denies the moral superiority of Europe. At the same time, to withstand her ravages, Asia is preparing to imitate the ruthless aspect which slays, which

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eats raw flesh, which tries to make the swallowing process easier by putting the blame on the victim.

But this, as we realize is only one side, however real and painful, of the Western civilization as it appears to us in the East.

Western humanity, when not affected by its unnatural relationship with the East, preserves a singular strength of moral conduct in the domain of its social life, which has its great inspiration for all of us. It is easy enough for us, when someone reviles us for our social evils, to point at worse evils in Europe ; but this is negative. The bigger thing to remember is, that in Europe these evils are not stagnant. There, the spiritual force in man is ever trying to come to grips. While, for instance, we find in Europe the evil Giant's fortress of Nation-

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alism, we also find Jack the Giant-Killer. For, there is growing up the international mind. This Giant-Killer, the international mind—though small in size—is real. In India, even when we are loudest in our denunciation of Europe, it is often her Giant's fortress that we long to build with awe and worship. We insult Jack with ridicule and suspicion. The chief reason for this is, that in India we have ourselves become material-minded. We are wanting in faith and courage. Since in our country the gods are sleeping, therefore, when the Titans come, they devour all our sacrificial offerings—there is never a hint of strife. The germs of disease are everywhere ; but man can resist disease only when his vital force is active and powerful.

So, too, even when the worship of the

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blood-thirsty and false gods of self-seeking are rampant on all sides, man can lift up his head to the skies if his spirit is awake. Both matter and spirit are active. They alone become entirely materialistic who are only half men, who cripple the native majesty of the spirit before the blind repetition of unintelligent activities ; who are niggardly in knowledge and palsied in action ; who are ever insulting themselves by setting up a meaningless ritualism in the place of true worship ; who have no difficulty whatever in believing that there is special sanctity inherent in particular forms and peculiar rites, even when their significance is neither known, nor knowable.

I know how reluctant it makes us feel to give any credit for humanity to the western civilization when we observe the

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brutalities into which this nationalism of theirs breaks out, instances of which are so numerous all the world over—in the late war, in the lynching of negroes, in cowardly outrages allowed to be committed by European soldiers upon helpless Indians, in the rapacity and vandalism practised in Peking during the Boxer war by the very nations who are never tired of vulgarly applying barbaric epithets to each other according to the vicissitudes of political expediency and passion. But while I have never sought to gloss over or keep out of mind any of these ugly phenomena, I still aver that in the life of the West they have a large tract where their mind is free ; whence the circulation of their thought-currents can surround the world. This freedom of the mind's ventilation following the constant growth of a

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vigorous life bears in it the promise of righting the wrong and purifying the noxious accumulation within.

To me the mere political necessity is unimportant ; it is for the sake of our humanity, for the full growth of our soul, that we must turn our mind towards the ideal of the spiritual unity of man. We must use our social strength, not to guard ourselves against the touch of others, considering it as contamination, but generously to extend hospitality to the world, taking all its risks however numerous and grave. We must manfully accept the responsibility of moral freedom, which disdains to barricade itself within dead formulae of external regulation, timidly seeking its security in utter stagnation. Men who live in dread of the spirit of enquiry and lack

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courage to launch out in the adventure of truth, can never achieve freedom in any department of life. Freedom is not for those who are not lovers of freedom and who only allow it standing space in the porter's vestibule for the sake of some temporary purpose, while worshipping, in the inner shrine of their life, the spirit of blind obedience.

In India what is needed more than anything else, is the broad mind which, only because it is conscious of its own vigorous individuality, is not afraid of accepting truth from all sources. Fortunately for us we know what such a mind has meant in an individual who belongs to modern India. I speak of Rammohun Roy. His learning, because of its depth and comprehensiveness, did not merely furnish him with materials for

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scholarship, but trained his mind for the free acceptance of truth. Rammohun Roy developed the courage and capacity to discriminate between things that are essential and those that are non-essential in the culture which was his by inheritance. This helped him to realize that truth can never be foreign, that money and material may exclusively belong to the particular country which produces them, but not knowledge, or ideas, or immortal forms of art.

The very magnitude of mind of such men becomes almost a grievance for smaller personalities, and Rammohun has been misunderstood by his own countrymen because he had in him this modern spirit of freedom and comprehensive grasp of truth. We must, however, never make the mistake of thinking that great men

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who are belittled by their contemporary compatriots do not represent their countries ; for countries are not always true to themselves.

In Rammohun Roy's life we find a concrete illustration of what India seeks, the true indication of her goal. Thoroughly steeped in the best culture of his country, he was capable of finding himself at home in the larger world. His culture was not for rejection of those cultures which came from foreign sources ; on the contrary, it had an uncommon power of sympathy which could adjust itself to them with respectful receptiveness.

The ideal I have formed of the culture which should be universal in India, has become clear to me from the life of Rammohun Roy. I have come to feel that the mind which has been matured in

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the atmosphere of a profound knowledge of its own country, and of the perfect thoughts that have been produced in that land, is ready to accept and assimilate the cultures that come from foreign countries. He who has no wealth of his own can only beg, and those who are compelled to follow the profession of beggary at the gate of the intellectually rich may gain occasional scraps of mental food, but they are sure to lose the strength of their intellectual character and their minds are doomed to become timid in thought and in creative endeavour.

All this time we have been receiving education on purely western lines. When this first began, western culture was imbued with a supreme contempt for that of the East. And to this day, consequently, we have been brought up in

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this contempt. This speaks of internal dissensions within the temple of Mother Saraswati. Her eastern sons kept closed the door leading to the western side for fear of adulteration, and her western sons barred their eastern windows through want of respect. Meanwhile the system of education in India remained, and still remains, absurdly un-Indian, making no adequate provision for our own culture. We have, here, not even anything like the facility which the German student enjoys in Germany for the study of the lore of Hindu and Moslem. And if we have become conscious of this vital deficiency in our education, that is because of the spirit of the times.

A certain number of us do not admit that our culture has any special features of value. These good people I leave out

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of account. But the number of those others is not few, who while admitting this value in theory, ignore it more or less in practice. Very often, the flourishing of the banner of this culture is not for the sake of the love of truth but for that of national vain-gloriousness—like brandishing a musical instrument in athletic display before one's own admiring family, instead of using it to make music.

This section of our people while never neglecting to make proud boast of their country's glory, have an absurdly narrow conception of the ideal in which that glory consists. Their indiscriminate reverence is for the actual, not for the eternal. The habits and customs of our decadence which have set up barriers between us and the world, splitting us into mutually exclusive sections, making us weak and

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bowing our heads in shame at every turn of our later history—these are the idols of their special worship, which they endow with endless virtues of their own imagining. They consider it to be their sacred mission to retain in perpetuity the waste matter sloughed off by age, as the true insignia of our Hindu civilization ; to extol the gleam of the will-o-the-wisp, born of the noxious miasma of decay, as more time-hallowed than the light of sun, moon and stars.

In our greed for immediate political result, we are apt to ascribe the fact of our tendency towards separateness to accidental circumstances, refusing to see that a code of behaviour, which has not the sanction of reason, and yet has the support of religion, must result in the creation of irreconcilable divisions

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between men. In reason alone can we have our common meeting ground ; for that which is against reason needs must be peculiar and exclusive, offering constant friction until worn away by the ever-active, rational mind of man. So when, for a body of men, popular custom is artificially protected by a religion which is allowed to usurp the entire range of human knowledge and conduct, it becomes a potent factor in maintaining an immense gap of aloofness and antagonism between closest neighbours.

The evolving Hindu social ideal has never been present to us as a whole, so that we have only a vague conception of what the Hindu has achieved in the past, or can attempt in the future. The partial view, before us at any moment, appears at the time to be the most important, so

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we can hardly bring ourselves to the true ideal, but tend to destroy it. And there we stand fasting and telling beads, emaciated with doing penance, shrinking into a corner away from the rest of the world.

We forget that Hindu civilization was once very much alive, crossing the seas, planting colonies, giving to and taking from all the world. It had its arts, its commerce, its vast and strenuous field of work. In its history, new ideas had their opportunity. Its women also, had their learning, their bravery, their place in the civic life. In every page of the Mahabharata we shall find proofs that it was no rigid, cast-iron type of civilization. The men of those days did not, like marionettes, play the same set piece over and over again. They progressed through mistakes, made discoveries through experi-

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ment, and gained truth through striving. They belonged to a free and varied *Samaj*, quick with life, driven into ever new enterprise by its active vigour.

This, however, was society which orthodoxy today would hardly recognize as Hindu, because it was living and had a growth which was revealing its inner unity through outer changes. So the *dharma* (principle) of life which thinks and doubts, accepts and rejects, progresses, changes and evolves, cannot, according to orthodoxy, be a part of the Hindu Dharma. Man shows his mental feebleness when he loses his faith in life because it is difficult to govern, and is only willing to take the responsibility of the dead because they are content to lie still under an elaborately decorated tomb-stone of his own make. We must know that life

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carries its own weight, while the burden of the dead is heavy to bear—an intolerable burden which has been pressing upon our country for ages.

The fact stands out clearly today that the Divinity dwelling within the heart of man cannot be kept immured any longer in the darkness of particular temples. The day of the *Ratha-yatra*, the Car Festival, has arrived when He shall come out on the high way of the world, into the thick of the joys and sorrows, the mutual commerce, of the throng of men. Each of us must set to work to build such car as we can, to take its place in the grand procession. The material of some may be of value, of others cheap. Some may break down on the way, others last till the end. But the day has come at last when all the cars must set out.

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III

Your letter has been a confirmation to me of the deep faith in the ultimate truths of humanity which we both try to serve and which sustains our being. I have tried to express how religion today as it exists in its prevalent institutionalised forms both in the West and the East has failed in its function to control and guide the forces of humanity ; how the growth of nationalism and wide commerce of ideas through speeded-up communication have often augmented external differences instead of bringing humanity together. Development of organizing power, mastery over Nature's resources have subserved secret passions or the openly flaunted greed of unashamed national

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glorification. And yet I do not feel despondent about the future. For the great fact remains that man has never stopped in his urge for self-expression, in his brave quest of knowledge ; not only so, there is today all over the world in spite of selfishness and unreason a greater *awareness* of truth. The fury of despotic tyranny, the denial of civic sanity and the violence with which the citadels of international federation are constantly assaulted, combine to betray an uncomfortable and increased consciousness in the mind of man of the inescapable responsibilities of humanity. It is this stirring of the human conscience to which we must look for a reassertion of man in religion, in political and economic affairs, in the spheres of education and social intercourse. It is apparent that innu-

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merable individuals in every land are rising up vitalized by this faith, men and women who have suffered and sought the meaning of life and who are ready to stake their all for raising a new structure of human civilization on the foundation of international understanding and fellowship. In this fact lies the great hope of humanity—this emergence in every nation, in spite of repression and the suicidal fever of national war-mindedness, of the clean and radiant fires of individual consciousness. When I read some of the outstanding modern books published after the War I realize how the brighter spirits of young Europe are now alive to the challenge of our times. Nothing can be of greater joy to us in India than to find how unimpeachably great some of your scholars, historians, artists and literary

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men are in their fearless advocacy of truth, their passion for righteousness. In India, too, there is a great awakening everywhere, mainly under the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi's singular purity of will and conduct, which is creating a new generation of clear-minded servers of our peoples. To these individuals of every land and race, these youthful spirits burning like clean flame on the altar of humanity, I offer my obeisance from the sunset-crested end of my road.

I feel proud that I have been born in this great Age. I know that it must take time before we can adjust our minds to a condition which is not only new, but almost exactly the opposite of the old. Let us announce to the world that the light of the morning has come, not for entrenching ourselves behind barriers, but

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for meeting in mutual understanding and trust on the common field of co-operation ; never for nourishing a spirit of rejection, but for that glad acceptance which constantly carries in itself the giving out of the best that we have.

Yours sincerely,

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