

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA.
NATIONAL LIBRARY, CALCUTTA.

Class No. *169.D.*
Book No. *1417.*

N. L. 38.

MGIPC—S3—7 LNL/55—26.5.55—25,000.

TAGORE ON CHINA AND JAPAN

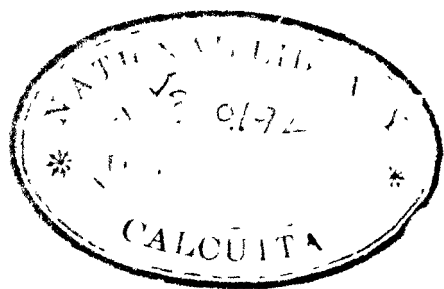
by HIRA LAL SETH

TAGORE

ON

CHINA AND JAPAN

BY
HIRA LAL SETH



TAGORE MEMORIAL PUBLICATIONS
LAHORE

Rupees Two

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
I. VISITING NIPPON - - -	7
II. THE POET AND THE MAN OF ACTION - - -	15
III. CHINA BEWARE! - - -	22
IV. TAGORE AND CHIANG KAI-SHEK -	31
V. POET REPLIES TO POET - -	37
VI. WAR AIMS AND PEACE AIMS -	56
VII. STOP THE JAP - - -	67

I Visiting Nippon

Unlike the present war, when from the very beginning admission into Japan has been restricted, and the only place where a foreign visitor determined to find out the truth could land is the concentration camp kept ready by the Jap police for undesirable foreigners—in the last war the foreigners visiting Nippon had not to hazard such risks and could roam about the country unscathed, and even enjoy, the wonder of it, freedom of speech at all times denied to Japanese people. Tagore was one of such care-free visitors to Japan who toured the land of the Nippon right in the midst of the last war. He was going to America, and he broke his journey in Japan. He met his countrymen in Tokyo. These men had become more or less the “sons of the soil” in Japan, or were naturalised as citizens enjoying the same rights as the Japanese. But lest the Japanese should bamboozle them in accepting all the unfamiliar credos of their militarism, Tagore gave them a piece

of his mind, and told them what he thought of Nippon.

He admitted their military strength, and noted the fact that they had progressed by leaps and bounds in a short period. or as Nehru would put it "bounded up with an amazing speed."

"I have come to discover something very great in the character of Japan. I am not blind to their faults. You may remember that when I first came to this part of the world I wrote a number of lectures upon Nationalism, which I read in the United States of America. The reason why these thoughts came to me in Japan was because it was here that I first saw the Nation in all its naked ugliness, whose spirit we orientals have borrowed from the West.

"It came vividly before my eyes, because on the one hand there were the real people of Japan, producing wonderful works of art, and in the details of their life giving expression to inherited codes of social behaviour and honour the spirit of Bushido: on the other hand, in contrast to the living side of the people was the spirit of the Nation, arrogantly proud, suffering from one obsession, that it was different from all other Asiatic peoples."

Such was the maddening contrast of Japan. Its progress and moderation were fascinating and seductive, but there was also arrogance and "the Nation in all its ugliness." The Japanese believed themselves to be

“different,” having “sprung straight from the loins of the gods.” Why did they believe like that? Why did Colonel Bushido assume the airs of Field-Marshal Bragdaccio? Tagore thought Japanese had gained in strength, but they had not digested this newly won power:

“Japan was faced with the most difficult trial of suddenly being startled into power and prosperity and has begun to show all the teeth and claws of the Nation which have been demoralising the civilised world, spreading far and wide an appalling amount of cruelty and deception. I could not specially blame Japan for this, but I heartily deplore the fact that she, with her code of honour, her ideal of perfection and her belief in the need for grace in everyday life, could yet become infected with this epidemic of selfishness and with the boastfulness of egotism.”

Having said as much and holding the views he did about Japan, Tagore could not escape censure of the Japanese people. They did not like this “sermonising” from him, and thought he was only misleading them from the path which the leaders of their country had chalked out for them. How did he react to such criticism?

“I frankly confess that I was then deeply mortified. For, though the people of Japan on this first occasion accepted me with enthusiastic welcome in the beginning, yet directly they came to know the ideas that I had, they felt nervous. They thought idealism would weaken their morale; that ideals were not for

those nations who must be unscrupulously strong; that the Nation must never have any feelings of disgust from the handling of diplomatic filth, or of shrinking from the use of weapons of brutal power. Human victims had to be sought, and the Nation had to be enriched with plunder.

“Nevertheless, I did not blame Japan for considering me to be dangerous. Though I felt the hurt of this evil yet at the same time I knew that beneath the iron mailcoat of the Nation the living spirit of the people had been working in secret. Today I feel sure that these people have the promise of a great future, though that may not be evident in the facts of the present.

“I deem myself fortunate in having noted certain characteristic truths in the Japanese race, which I believe will work through their sub-conscious mind and one day produce great results in a luminous revelation of their soul. It fills me almost with envy at their profound feeling for beauty, their calm sense of perfection that is expressed in various ways in their daily conduct, the constant exercise of patience of a strength which revels in the fashioning of exquisite behaviour with a self-control that is almost spiritual in its outward expression. It has required strenuous discipline and centuries of civilisation. I shall have to confess that the Japanese possess a monopoly of certain elements of heroism—heroism which is one with their artistic genius. In its essence, it has a strong

energy of movement ; in its form, it has that perfect proportion which comes of self-mastery. It is a creation of two opposing forces that of expression and that of repression."

In spite of the widespread resentment in Japan, awakened as a result of Rabindranath's views, the latter was not distraught. He expressed the hope that Japan would be one day redeemed by its better self. The rest of his peroration to his countrymen in Japan underlined this idea. He thought Japan would give up its militarism, nay even urged the Japanese people to renounce the cult of militarism.

"Japan must prove to the world that the present utilitarian spirit may be wedded to beauty. If science and art, necessity and joy, the machine and life are once united, that will be a great day. At present science is shamelessly dissociated from art. She is a barbarian, boastful of her immense muscle and superficial nature. But has she not come at last to the gate of the Truth, which gives us the mystery of the Beautiful ?

"Though we often find in Japan of to-day a hysteria of violence in her politics, an unscrupulous greed in her commerce, and an undignified lack of reticence in her public life, which makes us anxious for the moment, yet let us feel certain that all these have been borrowed from outside, that they have no deep root in her mind. Let us hope that the truth which they have in their inner being

will work through all contradictions and express itself through unaccountable ways in some sudden outbreak of revelation.

“Great periods of history are periods of eruption, unlooked for, and seemingly against the times, but they have all along been cradled in the dark chamber of the people's inner nature. The ugly spirit of the market has come from across the sea into the beautiful land of Japan. It may, for the time, find its lodging in the guest-house of the people; but their home will ultimately banish it. For it is a menace to the genius of her race, a sacrilege to the best that she has attained, and must keep safe not only for her own salvation, but the glory of all humanity.”

Needless to say that these great expectations of Tagore were never realised. Japan did not give up militarism, nor the spirit of the market. As a matter of fact, before that war ended, Japan had grabbed her own share of the booty, and quietly occupied the German possessions in the Pacific and in China. As for the spirit of the market, the period between the two wars was noted for commercial expansion of the Japanese. They flooded the markets of China, Indo-China, Thailand, East Indies, Burma and India with their goods, and enriched themselves at the expense of these countries. Is it any wonder then that Tagore should recant his hastily uttered views about adaptability of the Japanese to the ideas of a better world order based on justice, freedom and peace? This

very speech formed the subject of his comment twenty-two years later in 1938, when he discussed his past views about Japan in a letter to his friend, resident in that country. He wrote :

“ This (belief in change of Japanese attitude towards militarism) was in 1916 when some of the great nations in Europe went mad in their mutual destruction, and I fondly hoped that such a defamation of humanity could never happen in that beautiful country inhabited by a people who had inherited their ancient tradition of heroism that is chivalrous, a perfect combination of beauty and manliness. Though I had my glimmer of doubt yet I felt sure that the whole mind of this people would indignantly reject the hideousness that shamelessly unmasked itself in Europe at that murderous moment, the ruthless display of barbarity indulging in indiscriminate man-slaughter, using torturous weapons finished in laboratory cowardly in their mechanical efficiency and soulless ravage, revealing a diabolical callousness in their deliberate destruction of centres of culture with scientific abominations rained from the sky. I could never dream in those not very distant days that I should ever have woefully to revise my estimate of the greatness of this people whose co-operation we had eagerly expected in building up of a noble future in Asia by their sympathy and true love of freedom at this period of changing scenes in world history

when the lamp of Europe in its last flicker seems to produce more poisonous fume than flame."

Thus the Japanese finally lost the sympathy of a man, who was in the beginning a friendly critic of their regime, and who was of all Indians best equipped to interpret Japan to this country, having imbibed the Japanese culture ; and expressed admiration for their past civilisation. Tagore became implacably hostile to Japan.

II

The Poet and the Man of Action

Rabindranath had been alternately pleased and annoyed with Japan. It may be said that as a poet who had drunk the Japanese culture to the dregs, he had been first impressed with the achievements of the Nippon, then alarmed at his intransigence, and finally disillusioned with his militaristic spirit and had in wrath hit out at the Japanese, and given them a piece of his mind. Just like a poet—his critics would say—to extol the Japanese first to the skies, and then hurl them on the ground.

But Tagore had not looked at Japan as an old-fashioned poet, with high tinge of emotionalism, and only remotely associated with the political thought of the day. It was not a will-o'-the-wisp idea of his first to praise Japan and then denounce it. He did not look at the world from his poetic window, with an air of superiority and detached amusement. He was the mainstay of the movement for global freedom and global unity against militarist-chauvinist spirit

abroad in the world. He was the poet who encouraged the revolutionary spirit in the world, and sang odes of liberation of its people. The praise of Japan in the first instance represented the views of a wide-awake, and politically conscious man, who saw in Japanese nationalism the desire of the people of that country to manage their own affairs, without let or hindrance by the nations of the West. But when Jap nationalism became aggressive Rabindranath's views changed accordingly.

It would be said that if Rabindranath saw Nippon changing after the first world war, why did he not actively associate himself with some movement aimed at uprooting Jap militarism and other such isms in the world, closely allied to aggressive ideology of the Nippon ?

That was of course what happened. That was the goal of every revolutionary poet of an epoch fraught with dynamic change.

And that is what could not happen if Rabindranath were the old-fashioned poet looking at the political world with detached amusement !

But a mighty conflict raged in the mind of the Poet, as to his future role in the world of political action. He had established Santiniketan with the aim of giving light and learning to India, but he knew that it could not be an institution exclusively devoted to learning and indifferent to the fate of the wide world. It must keep pace with the

times. In 1924 when the Poet was proceeding to China, he wrote a letter to Romain Rolland, another avowed opponent of militarist-imperialist spirit, which gives us an insight into his mental outlook at that time; and we can know where he stood politically eight years after his first visit to Japan, which had made such profound impression on him. Referring to an English friend of his who had played useful part in establishing Santiniketan, and strengthening it, and who had also accompanied him in his visits to Japan and U.S.A., Tagore wrote :

“ In fact lately his mind was distracted when Santiniketan outgrew its vocation as a mere educational body belonging to the immediate locality, when it tried to respond in its various efforts to what I consider to be the great call of the present age. He was afraid lest our attention should in the least measure be diverted from the children attending our school into a channel for the communication of ideas and formation of a community.”

The call of that age after the war was achievement of world freedom, establishment and preservation of democracy, and preservation of peace. To this call Santiniketan under leadership of Tagore had responded, and accordingly it aimed at training those scholars who had sought light and learning from that institution for their role in the community. This pursuit of idealism certainly involved for the scholars, for teachers, and for Tagore himself, the abandonment of the

attitude of exclusive devotion to books while ignoring the epoch-making events in the world outside. It meant renunciation of life of ease and comfort, and actively associating with the welfare and well-being of the community. Prosperous people, idle rich, conservatives, and the like might well find this difficult. Wrote Tagore :

"No doubt idealism is a disturbing factor in all settled form of life and therefore prosperous people have a vigorous suspicion against it. There is such a thing as the enjoyment of emotional prosperity where the stimulation to our feeling of love is constantly supplied."

But Tagore did not have any suspicions about the "harms" of idealism. A conflict raged in his mind as to how far he was to devote himself to his poetic work, when the world was in full flood of idealism—he did not hide this conflict and said :

"I understand this conflict in his (English friend of Tagore) mind because I myself have a kind of civil war constantly going on in my own nature between my personality as a creative artist, who necessarily must be solitary and that as an idealist who must realise himself through works of complex character needing a large field of collaboration with a large body of men. My conflict is within myself between the two opposite forces in my character. . . . Both of the contending forces being equally natural to me I cannot with impunity get rid of one of them

in order to simplify my life's problem. I suppose a proper rhythm is possible to be attained in which both may be harmonised and my work in the heart of the crowd may find its grace through the touch of the breath that comes from the solitude of the creative mind."

Most of the poets of our time who have associated themselves with the movement for freedom and progress felt in this strain after the outbreak of the war. The old concept of poetry which was devoid of the revolutionary spirit of the time had ceased to have any meaning for them. They wanted to attune their poems in keeping with the spirit of the times, even though it meant for some time giving up the solitude of the "creative artist" and seeking inspiration from the struggle of the masses.

Tagore had similar feelings. He wanted to be associated with these movements of progress. But how was this to be done? It needed organisation and concentration of his energy on some ideal of democracy, otherwise there was danger of his becoming completely isolated from those movements—indeed from political life itself:

"But unfortunately at the present moment the claim of the organisation is rudely asserting itself, and I do not know how to restrain it within bounds. The poet in me is hurt, his atmosphere of leisure dust-laden. I do not wish that my life's sunset should thus be obscured in a murky air of strenuous work,

the work which perpetually devours its own infinite background of Peace. I earnestly hope that I shall be rescued in time before I die—in the meanwhile I go to China, in what capacity, I do not know. Is it as a poet or as a bearer of good advice and sound common sense?"

China was then the ideal country to visit for a poet, who did not wish to write mystic poetry only and live in such murky and dust-laden atmosphere ; but instead write the march-song for the masses and the progressive people of the world rallying under the banner of progress.

It was pulsating with new life, Sun Yat Sen having established a republic and ushered in a dawn of freedom. But it was also grappling with problems born of that freedom—such as the extra-territorial rights of Western Powers, who were up in arms against New China for wishing to end these rights. There were also dangers of civil war against the war-lords and Chinese communists and above all there was the danger of Japan. While Tagore could as a poet feel inspired with the noble struggle of the Chinese people for freedom, unity and bread, he could also advise them and offer them "sound common sense" so that the revolution should be completed soon.

Though some leaders like Chiang Kai-Shek pursued in the early stages of the revolution the fatal policy of war against the communists and were in this matter inflexible in

their determination, yet men like Tagore could offer their advice on several other matters, such as social and cultural uplift which the people in China needed so much.

Tagore could also warn the Chinese people against the evils of aggressive nationalism just as he had warned the Japanese. But while Japan did not heed these words, China followed a policy of peace in foreign matters and nationalism there became neither expansionist nor aggressive.

Tagore's visit to China was then doubly useful—to the Poet himself because he wanted to see for himself the conflict in that country, and the efforts made by its people for freedom and thus seek inspiration for his poetry—to the Chinese people, because they needed the advice of the sage in matter of education, democracy and peace. If in some matters they still acted in the merry old careless way, in others they followed his teachings.

III

China Beware !

Tagore returned from China strengthened in his convictions of world freedom and peace, and conscious of his role as the representative poet of a revolutionary epoch. But he also understood the Chinese case against Japan. The question in China boiled down to this—the Chinese were carrying on peacefully the task of reconstruction, and Japan coveted their territory, and resources of their country, and waited for the opportunity to pounce upon that country and carve out huge slices out of it. It was sheer brigandage, which the Japanese people had made as their “noble” profession. Hitler once said that men are united either due to common ideals or common criminality. The latter part of the saying was true in case of the Japanese people, who had united due to ideas of common criminality. But the Japanese did not only covet Chinese territory, they wanted to destroy the Chinese nation culturally as well as a social force. Their political aims were clear in 1924-25 when they were carrying out

small marauding attacks against China, or holding out threats of use of the full resources of the Nippon. They were able to improve on these escapades in 1931; when they invaded Manchuria, but it was a couple of years later that they began the task of demoralising the Chinese people by spreading use of opium. They also aimed a blow at their culture when they started pulling down cultural centres of China. It were these measures of the Japanese which made Tagore realise that what the Japanese aimed at in China was total and ruthless war, ending in (imagined) extermination of the Chinese race.

While the Japanese were planning the annihilation of Chinese culture along with the physical destruction of the people of China, Tagore was seized with the idea of establishing a chair of Chinese culture in his university and thus spreading that culture in India. When the Japanese started practising what they had so far only planned, Tagore's plan had materialised, and with the help of Prof. Tan Yuan Shan, the Director of Sino-Indian Cultural Society at Visvabharati, he was able to open the flood gates of Chinese culture to the men and women of India anxious to gain wisdom from that ancient land. Tagore and the Japanese war-lords were long before the year 1937 pursuing two diametrically opposed paths. What Tagore wanted to revive, the Jap war-lords were out to destroy.

But there should be no mistake about

Tagore's attitude. If he was reviving Chinese culture in this country, that did not mean the end of the cultural struggle in China. Chinese people fought on bravely to preserve their cultural movements and they had Tagore's blessing.

China's troubles increased visibly after 1937, when the Japs opened up large-scale attack. Now the cultural centres in the central and south China were also threatened, just as formerly they were in the north. The Japs bombed these parts of the country mercilessly. The bodies of the Chinese were mutilated by the blast of the bombs and the cuts of the shrapnels and their souls writhed in unspeakable agony, because China's cultural centres such as the Nanking University were laid into waste and the task of years was undone in days and even hours.

Now was the time for Tagore to act. He could not be satisfied with merely spreading Chinese culture in India. While that task must continue, he had to actively associate himself with the anti-Japanese movement in the world. Prof. Tan Yuan Shan, good old soul, who was the leading light of Sino-Indian Cultural Society at Visvabharati could not remain in this country, because his heart was lacerated at the woes of China. He went to his country, and Tagore gave him a message to be delivered to the fighting Generalissimo of the Chinese :

,"Your neighbouring nation which is largely indebted to you for the gift of your

cultural wealth and therefore should naturally cultivate your comradeship for its own ultimate benefit has suddenly developed a virulent infection of imperialistic rapacity imported from the West, and turned the great chance of building the bulwark of a noble destiny in the East into a dismal disaster. Its loud bluster of power, its ruthless orgy of indiscriminate massacre of life, demolition of education centres, its callous defiance of all civilised codes of humanity has brought humiliation on the modern spirit of Asia, that is struggling to find its honoured place in the forefront of the modern age. It is all the more unfortunate, because some of the proud Powers of the West, tottering under the burden of their bloated prosperity are timidly condoning the blood-sodden politics of the standard-bearers of their own highly reputed civilisation, humbly bending their knees at the altar of indecent success that has blasted some time-honoured citadels of sacred human rights.

“ At this desperate age of moral upset it is natural for us to hope that the continent which has produced the two greatest men, Buddha and Christ, in the whole course of human events, must still fulfil its responsibility to maintain the purest expression of character in the teeth of the scientific affrontery of the evil genius of man. Has not that expectation already shown its first luminous streak of fulfilment in the person of Gandhi in a historical horizon obscured by centuries of indignity? However Japan has cynically

refused its own great possibility, its noble heritage of 'Bushido' and has offered a most painful disillusionment to us in an unholy adventure, which through even some apparent success of hers is sure to bend her down to the dust loaded with a fatal burden of failure.

"Our only consolation lies in the hope that the deliberate aggression of violence that has assailed your country will bear a sublime meaning in the heroic suffering it causes in a promise of the birth of a new soul of the nation. You are the only great people in the world who never had the snobbishness of extolling the military power as of the glorious characteristics of national spirit, and when the same brute force of militarism with its hideous efficiency has overtaken your country, we pray with all our heart that you may come out of this trial once again to be able to justify your trust in the true heroism of higher humanity in this cowardly world ready to prove traitor to its own best ideals. Even if a mere physical success be immediately missed by you, yet your moral gain will never be lost, and the seeds of victory that are being sown through this terrible struggle in the depth of your being will over and over again prove their deathlessness."

In the first part of his message Tagore stressed the fact that the culture of the Nippon which had so much dazzled him in 1916 was mainly borrowed from China, which country had generously spread ideas of its civilisation in the neighbouring countries.

just as republican France had after 1792 led the countries of Europe in matter of political awakening. Having learned so much from the Chinese the Japanese turned against that country, as they have turned against the West, which taught them so much in matter of modern science, military, and industrial skill.

Thus the Japanese were committing matricide in China, for that country was the mother of all civilisations in the neighbouring countries, including that of Japan.

But these matricides said that they were the leaders of a New Asia. How could that claim be true? Asia, said Tagore, had given to the world such men as Christ and Buddha, who had transformed the entire fabric of society in their times. Gandhi was the living embodiment of their teachings. Asia had learned the lesson of non-violence from these three great men. It had realised that the way to peace lay in renunciation of war as a method of solving international disputes. Instead of war must be substituted the method of peaceful negotiation.

While the people of Asia wanted to follow such a policy in their external affairs, Japan had struck at China and thus proved itself to be an outcast in the family of Asiatic nations. As for home policy, the Japanese were carrying on the programme of modernisation, just as other Asiatic people were. But they had harnessed all this modern equipment to the needs of military. There could be no meeting ground between

the Japanese and the other people of Asia, who had renounced faith in aggressive wars.

The Japanese had finished the task of modernising their country earlier, and instead of helping other countries in this as well as in achievement of their freedom, they wanted to keep the latter tied to the cooly level of subsistence. Their military machine perfected to a high pitch was working with deadly effect in China. They were achieving some local success but ultimate victory according to Tagore lay with the Chinese people. Their case was morally strong and even if they did not win victory in the field immediately (though now Chinese steam-roller is grinding down Jap pebbles and stones), the world would not consider them as vanquished. Physically they might perish, but the spirit of resistance awakened by them was imperishable. Their struggle for freedom had encouraged other people, and they were in fact fighting not only their own battle, but the battle of the entire world. By offering stern resistance to Japan, they delayed the outbreak of world war in the Pacific by at least four and a half years. The Dutch Indies, Burma, Malaya and other countries were saved from an invasion, while the invasion of India was made impossible for all times to come — the Japanese having thrown out into Chinese battle a large portion of their army. The democratic countries had valuable time in which to complete their programme of armament building.

But instead of showing gratitude to China, and assisting that country in its noble struggle, they turned away, and let China stew in its own juice.

Tagore was then loud in his denunciation of these Powers who had let down China. Their guilt was obvious, but according to them they were doing no wrong. They were pursuing a uniform policy in Spain as in China!

Tagore thought them to be bloated with prosperity, which made them indifferent to the fate of China. He was right—while the Chinese were being mutilated, and cut to pieces, financiers in New York and London were fattening on the money earned from sale of oil, lead, etc., to Nippon.

How did the Chinese people react to this message of Tagore? His message was soon flashed across the cities and villages of China from the ether. China heard this message attentively and realised that one of the most powerful personalities in India—indeed Asia and the world, had through his special envoy raised his voice against the Jap rapacity in China. Long after the death of Tagore—these words would be remembered in China, even though (as one day it must) the present bloody struggle in that country is ended victoriously for the Chinese, and they set about the long-awaited task of internal reconstruction.

As for the effect of the words of Tagore on the people of South-West Pacific, East

Indies, Indo-China, Malaya, Burma, etc., the Poet had toured all these areas, and given free vent to his own innermost thoughts. The people in these regions were heartened and if the Chinese and other elements fought the invader stubbornly four and a half years later (and would do so again, when allied armada streams towards these islands and the bugle of revolt sounds) it was because spark had been previously ignited by men like Tagore, who enjoyed considerable influence in these regions.

IV

Tagore and Chiang Kai-Shek

To the warm and affectionate message of Tagore the leader of the fighting China, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek, replied :

" Your letters on the Sino-Japanese conflict and India's sympathy endow China's anti-aggression fight with moral courage."

The courier was of course Prof. Tan Yuan Shan who had taken Tagore's message to the Chinese Generalissimo. Chiang Kai-Shek was no poet. He was a born fighter, well versed with the art of war. Yet he could appreciate the fine humanitarian message of Tagore and understand his feelings for China.

What gave him such depth of vision and a discerning heart? Was it because he had seen the sufferings of the Chinese people as a common fighter in their ranks, that he had developed an outlook of universal brotherhood, and welcomed the hand of friendship extended by those steeped in similar tradition of brotherhood of man? This nearness of Chiang to his people at all times was of course one reason of his humanitarian outlook.

The other was his undying faith in Christian ideals which coloured the activities of his life. It was because of influence of Christ that Chiang had become devoted to ideals of peace.

Tagore also considered Christ to be one of the greatest men of this continent that history had ever thrown up. He wished that the teachings of Christ and Buddha about peace could again find acceptance with men and women of this earth.

Here then was the basis of joint action between the two great men of our continent—Tagore and Chiang. If they could thus co-operate with each other, millions of their followers and admirers could receive guidance in matters vital to the problems of East Asia, from Karachi to Kamchatka. One only wonders, what these two men could achieve by way of regeneration of East Asia, if the war had not inflicted cruel wounds first on China, and then on other countries of South-East Asia. As it was, the utmost that these two men could do was to administer “soothing balm” to the lacerated hearts of the peoples subjected to day and night relentless pounding from land, air, and sea; and ask them to fight on the foes, with every conceivable weapon in keeping with the traditions of civilised warfare.

But now that the warfare in China is drawing to its inexorable end, we find that one of these two great men, who were jointly endeavouring to usher in a new era in the

East, has dropped off and has been in fact a war casualty. When the peace conference opens and the affairs of East Asia form the subject of discussion among statesmen, Chiang, who is to play a great part in these discussions, would miss Tagore, who was his collaborator in earlier days in matter of peace politics of the East. And not only Chiang but other statesmen of East would also miss Tagore who could plan the peace in East Asia and also with his moral influence among the people see to it that these plans were translated into action.

It was considered to be a major tragedy of the last war, that Woodrow Wilson, who fathered the peace plan in 1919, did not live long after the end of war. If he had, he would have convinced Americans of the folly of isolationism, and carried by assault the citadel of militarists in U.S.A., when it was widely believed that the game was up with the peace and freedom advocates in that country. Would the early death of Tagore be interpreted in the same way by the peace-lovers of the East, or would Chiang and other statesmen carry the day at the peace conference single-handed? Time alone can tell.

It was not only the statesmen of the East, the Chinese masses, and the people inhabiting the vast regions of East Asia, who were the poorer as a result of death of Rabindranath Tagore. These people realised his loss. The cause of peace, too, sustained a great setback. But Tagore had received warm res-

ponse for his peace efforts from unexpected quarters. People as remotely connected with politics as the Chinese finance king Kung had given him unstinted support. Dr. Kung who has been for long Chinese Finance Minister and who was replaced recently wrote :

“I take the opportunity to ask Prof. Tan Yuan Shan, who is shortly returning to India, to convey to you my deepest regards and heart-felt gratitude.

“Your noble voice vindicating peace and justice, and your valued message to my people have both given us no end of courage and inspiration.

“Our people in China have the same instinctive regard for peace and equity as you have in India. It would therefore be easy for you to imagine the amount of provocation that has compelled us today to take recourse to armed resistance against the militarist aggression of Japan.

“The inhuman brutalities of the Japanese soldiers beggar all description. Not only have they violated the territorial integrity of China, and encroached upon the rights and freedom of the Chinese, they have also, at the very same time imperilled the sublime culture of the East, betrayed the great spirit of Asia and menace the peace and security of the whole world. Realising as we do our full responsibility to our own race as well to world, we will not lay down our arms till the last of the ruthless aggressors has been driven

out of China.

"It is true that the Japanese have succeeded in occupying several of our big towns and cities. But contrary to their expectations, our desire and strength to fight back have also increased in equal proportion. And now we are confident that the ultimate victory will be ours.

"No two countries in the world have been so intimately connected to each other as India and China. Their cultural bond is as strong today as it was in the past. Much of this revival in our cultural relationship is due to your laudable guidance and noble effort. We fully realise and admire the sincerity of your friendship for us in hour of our trial. Let me assure you of our earnest desire to co-operate with you in your endeavours to promote the culture of the Orient."

Chiang Kai-Shek and Tagore had identical views about internationalism and peace, but the Marshal's reply to Poet was brief. It did not cover various points raised in the message of the Sage of India. Finance king Kung had in his letter dealt with all these matters. He agreed with the Poet that Japanese vandalism had not spared the monuments of culture in China, and deliberately laid waste the universities, etc. Here was a Chinese eye-witness account to confirm what had already been noticed by press in every country.

He also stressed that Chinese leaders had a responsibility "to our own race, as well as

to the world." Tagore had also hinted that China's gallant struggle was not only its own but of the entire world. There was then the declaration of continuing the fight till the last Jap was cleared of the Chinese soil. This set at rest Tagore's fears about Jap advance. Tagore had faith in Chinese resistance but he knew that the Japs had occupied considerable portion of China. This advance, the Chinese were to prevent, and they were also, according to Kung, going to get back their land.

In the end, finance king Kung stressed the unity of India and China.

Time has proved the truth of Kung's statement about Indo-Chinese unity. Relations between the two countries were already cordial. The bond was strengthened due to the efforts of the political leaders of the two countries.

Numerous Chinese soldiers came to this country and they had an opportunity to study the problems of India. This also cemented relations.

Only Tagore is not there to bless this unity—the meeting between the two countries. But we have the word of Tagore, since then confirmed by finance king Kung that he yearned for the day when India and China could be bound together in an eternal bond of unity.

V

Poet Replies to Poet

Tagore's words to China rankled like a running sore into the body of every Japanese, from Emperor Hirehoto down to the merest fisherman, fishing in the troubled waters of the Pacific, and dreaming his dreams about a far-flung empire embracing Australia and America. Back in 1916 when Tagore had dared to criticise, somewhat mildly no doubt, the mad pranks of the Japanese people, there had been an uproar in Tokyo and other parts of the country.

Now too, the Japanese conscious of their ignoble mission in China and South-West Pacific wanted to disengage the Poet from the group of avowed enemies of their own brand of fascism. If they could succeed in it, their propaganda "blitz" in the countries which were to be their prospective victims had some chance of success. Tagore's criticism of Japan could be compared to criticism of Nazi Germany made by the Pope in the early days of the war. The alarmed Prussians and *junker* barons hastily sought to remove the suspicions

and fears of the Vatican, being no less afraid of its curse than their savage ancestors.

But who was to appease the Poet ? A poet was selected for this purpose. His name was Yone Noguchi. This man was of course the mouthpiece of Imperial Nippon. His poetry contained unabashed praise of the Nipponese militarist deeds and the new jingoist spirit which stalked the land in Japan ; and was in fact much in the strain of Nazi Horst Wessel song.

Before describing the moves of appeasement chief Noguchi, it would be well to point out that culture, poetry and art were regimented in Japan. Noguchi not only sang imperialist odes, but also he was born and brought up in an atmosphere in which freedom of expression was denied to the artist, as it was to the other people in matter of their political rights, such as free assembly, discussion of political problems facing the country, etc. Noguchi had been told from the very beginning that the Japanese did no wrong, and were the most incorruptible race in the world, being sublime, and all that. Therefore it was a matter of genuine wonder to him that Tagore thought otherwise.

The difference between Tagore and Noguchi was the difference between George Bernard Shaw and Herr Doktor Goebbels. Tagore had been brought up in an atmosphere which was comparatively free, though not as free as that in England, where Bernard Shaw grew up to be a trenchant critic of British conservatism.

His art was unfettered. He did not write hymns in praise of the British. If he sometimes praised some features of their life in England, he often criticised them. He knew they had gone wrong quite often.

He criticised the Japanese just as he would the British, the Indians or the Chinese, if he discovered them going wrong.

But what stank in the nostrils of the Japanese like Yone Noguchi was not as much the sympathy expressed by Tagore for China (though that also caused offence) as the denunciation of Jap crimes in China made by the great Indian Poet. Yone Noguchi denied that the Japs had deviated from the codes of civilised warfare or committed any atrocities against the Chinese people.

Years later on reflection it seems that Noguchi had raised a ballyhoo over nothing. If as he said no atrocities had been committed, the best course was to leave the matter to the members of International Red Cross who should have been asked to visit the scenes of atrocities such as Nanking, Canton, Shanghai, and hold an impartial enquiry. Both the Chinese and the Japanese Governments should have provided facilities to this end to that body. Then men like Tagore could abide by the verdict of the Red Cross members.

Recently the Japanese have allowed members of International Red Cross to visit some, if not all of the prisoners of war camps, reputed to be as bad as Dachau, the famous Nazi concentration camp, and the Red Cross mem-

bers have stated that satisfactory treatment was being accorded to the prisoners in these camps. Thus so far as these camps are concerned, it could not be said that atrocities are being committed there.

Why did the Japanese Government then hesitate to allow the International Red Cross to visit these cities in China, and why did not Yone Noguchi strive to this end in his own country, instead of complaining of the denunciation of Tagore ?

The Japanese it seems are clever folk, and Yone Noguchi was too shrewd a propagandist to suggest any such course to the Japanese Government, when he knew that an unfavourable report by members of International Red Cross would have caused wide repercussions all over the world, and not only Tagores everywhere would be up in arms against Japan, but also general public would be indignant, and the demonstrations against Japan, already not infrequent in England and America, would be on the increase. The Japs still wanted to retain goodwill of these countries, and get supplies to wage war in China.

But instead of suggesting such diplomatic moves to his government, and winning goodwill of Tagore, appeasement chief Noguchi thought of another alternative. He thought that if he could falsify the reports of atrocities as published in a Calcutta paper, *Modern Review*, noted for its appreciation of life-work of Rabindranath Tagore, then the task of convincing Tagore was as good as half

done. So in his letter to the Poet, he had a go at the *Modern Review* and said :

" Admitting that China completely defeated Japan in foreign publicity, it is sad that she often goes too far and plays trickery. For one instance I will call your attention to reproduced pictures from a Chinese paper on page 247 of the *Modern Review* for last August as a living specimen of ' Japanese atrocities in China : execution of Chinese civilian.' So awful pictures they are—awful enough to make ten thousand enemies of Japan in a foreign country. But the pictures are nothing but a Chinese invention, simple and plain, because the people on the scene are all Chinese, slaughterers and all. Besides any one with common sense would know if he stops for a moment, that it is impossible to take such pictures as these at the front. Really I cannot understand, how your friend—editor of the *Modern Review*—happened to publish them."

Tagore of course let this friend-editor speak for himself, who indulged in a plain speaking and left the appeasement chief in doubt about his determination to expose the Jap crimes in China, if found out to be true :

" But who said they (the pictures referred to by Noguchi) were taken at the front," wrote the *Modern Review*: " They might have been taken at places already under Jap occupation for some time.

" The pictures referred to were reproduced from photographs sent to us by a trust-

worthy friend who has been in China for months and who is neither Chinese nor Japanese. There were other photographs sent to us which were more revolting. These along with others we sent to him (Congress President). The bombing of open towns and villages, killing countless millions—men, women and children, and other Japanese barbarities on a colossal scale which have been reported in the papers and brought to the notice of the League of Nations have not been contradicted. The atrocities of which we published pictures are mere peccadilloes in comparison. We have found these pictures in some Chinese pamphlets also. Mr. Noguchi says the men in the pictures, slaughterers and all are Chinese. But how can one distinguish Chinese from Japanese in these photographs.

“ We have no feelings of hostility against the people of Japan, and never intended to make enemies of them. But it is our unpleasant duty to record facts. Our pictures cannot make more enemies of Japan than the atrocities ascribed to her in numerous newspapers.”

Tagore's editor-friend had flatly denied that the pictures published by him were wrong. The pictures in question depicted (1) a Chinese sitting on the ground gaping sadly towards the cameraman, while the Jap executioner held him by the tuft of his hair, sword in hand and ready to strike him dead without any remorse ; (2) the figure of a

forelorn Chinese standing in the field with a Jap soldier at some distance from him. His hands are tied behind him, and he is evidently facing a firing squad; (3) another Chinese sitting with bended knees, head and chest high up, and with hands tied behind him. Near him stand three or four Japanese, gaping with evident pleasure, while the executioner Jap gets ready to cut off the head of his victim with the sword which he holds in his hand. He has in fact uplifted his hand, and is shown in the act of striking the blow.

This is a very gruesome sight, terrible to behold. However it is not more gruesome than similar pictures published about massacres of loyalists in Spain. Those pictures were smuggled by people who happened to survive such ordeal and get away with their life, or they were reproduced from rebel newspapers. Often the Spanish fascist executioners took the photographs of their victims. The Japanese executioners were not of different fibre. There is little reason to doubt the stories in one case as in the other.

Moreover the Congress President, Subhas Bose, had received these photographs. He is not a man who could countenance falsehood about China or Japan. He is a keen student of foreign affairs and knows a good deal about Japanese habits and customs. He had in fact denounced Jap aggression in China. If the photographs were untrue, he would have denied it. Thus Tagore's editor-friend came out unscathed from this controversy raised by

Nippon's mouthpiece Yone Noguchi.

Noguchi, appeaser, received first rebuff in his efforts to pull chestnuts out of fire for his masters in Tokyo. The second, which was indeed a slap on the face of the Japanese poet, came from Rabindranath himself who wrote to Noguchi:

"I thank you for taking the trouble to write to me again. I have also read with interest your letter addressed to the press. It makes the meaning of your letter to me more clear.

"I am flattered that you still consider it worth while to take such pains to convert me to your point of view, and I am really sorry that I am unable to come to my senses as you have been pleased to wish it. It seems to me it is futile for either of us to try to convince the other since your faith in the infallible right of Japan to bully other Asiatic nations into line with your government's policy is not shared by me, and my mistrust of a patriotism which claims the right to bring to the altar of its country the sacrifice of other peoples' rights, and happiness is sneared at by you as the 'quiescence of a spiritual vagabond.'

"If you can convince the Chinese that your armies are bombing their cities, and rendering their women and children homeless beggars—those of them that are not transformed into 'mutilated mudfish', to borrow one of your own phrases—if you can convince these victims that they are only being sub-

jected to a benevolent treatment, which will in the end 'save their nation, it will no longer be necessary for you to convince us of your country's noble intentions.' Your righteous indignation against the 'polluted people' who are burning their own cities, and art-treasures (and presumably bombing their own citizens) to malign your soldiers, reminds me of Napoleon's noble wrath when he marched into a deserted Moscow and watched its palaces in flames. I should have expected from you, who are a poet, at least that much imagination to feel to what inhuman despair a people must be reduced to willingly burn their own handiwork of years' indeed centuries' labour. And even as a good nationalist, do you seriously believe that the mountains of bleeding corpses and the wilderness of bombed and burnt cities that is every day widening between your two countries, is making it easier for you two peoples to stretch your hands in a clasp of everlasting goodwill?

"You complain that while the Chinese being 'dishonest' are spreading their propaganda, your people being 'honest' are reticent. Do you not know, my friend, that there is no propaganda like good and noble deeds, and that if such deeds be yours, you need not fear any 'trickery' of your victims? Nor need you fear the bogey of communism, if there is no exploitation of the poor among your own people and the workers feel that they are justly treated.

"I must thank you for explaining to me the meaning of our Indian philosophy, and pointing out that Kali and Siva must compel our approval of Japan's 'dance of death' in China. I wish you had drawn a moral from a religion more familiar to you, and appealed to the Buddha for your justification. But I forget that your priests and artists have already made sure of that, for I saw in a recent issue of the *Osaka Mainichi* and the *Tokyo Nichi* (16th September, 1938) a picture of the Buddha erected to bless the massacre of your neighbours.

"You must forgive me if my words sound bitter. Believe me, it is sorrow and shame not anger that prompt me to write to you. I suffer intensely not only because the reports of Chinese suffering batter against my heart, because I can no longer point out with pride the example of a great Japan. It is true that there are no better standards prevalent anywhere else and that the so-called civilised people of the West are proving equally barbarous and even less 'worthy of trust.' If you refer me to them, I have nothing to say. What I should have liked is to be able to refer them to you. I shall say nothing of my own people, for it is vain to boast until one succeeds in sustaining one's principles to the end.

"I am quite conscious of the honour you do me in asking me to act as a peacemaker. Were it in any way possible for me to bring you two peoples together, and see you freed

from this death-struggle, and pledged to the great common 'work of reconstructing the new world in Asia,' I would regard the sacrifice of my life in the cause a proud privilege. But I have no power save that of moral persuasion, which you have so eloquently ridiculed. You who want me to be impartial, how can you expect me to appeal to Chiang Kai-Shek to give up resisting unless the aggressors have first withdrawn their aggression? Do you know that last week when I received a pressing invitation from an old friend of mine in Japan to visit your country, I actually thought for a moment, foolish idealist as I am, that your people may really need my services to minister to the bleeding heart of Asia, and to help extract from its riddled body the bullets of hatred? I wrote to my friend:

" ' Though the present state of my health is hardly favourable for any strain of long foreign journey, I should seriously consider your proposal if proper opportunity is given me to carry out my own mission, while there, which is to do my best to establish a civilised relationship of national amity between two great peoples of Asia who are entangled in a desolating mutual destruction. But as I am doubtful whether the military authorities of Japan, which seem bent upon devastating China, in order to gain their object, will allow me the freedom to take my own course, I shall never forgive myself, if I am tempted for any reason whatever to pay a friendly

visit to Japan just at this unfortunate moment and thus cause a misunderstanding. You know I have a genuine love for the Japanese people and it is sure to hurt me too painfully to go and watch crowds of them being transported by their rulers to a neighbouring land to perpetuate acts of inhumanity which will brand their name with a lasting stain in the history of Man.'

"After the letter was despatched came the news of the fall of Canton and Hankow. The cripple shorn of his power to strike may collapse, but to be able to ask him to forget the memory of his mutilation as easily as you want me to, I must expect him to be an angel

"Wishing your people whom I love, not success, but remorse."

Tagore makes it clear in the outset that he was unconvinced about Japanese case (if indeed they had any case for aggression in China), and in this he was no different from his editor-friend, whom Noguchi had first tried "to correct." He could also not convince the Japanese poet, because the pro-militarist propaganda had been dinned into the ears of Noguchi from the childhood. One could no more convince him, than one could the Egyptian sphinx.

What Noguchi said about "saving" China had been said since time immemorial by all adventurers and militarists, who set foot on foreign soil, to enslave, plunder and exploit the people residing there. Tagore had put

forward a simple test "of Jap generosity to China," and that was the Japanese should convince the recipients of such charity that they were indeed indebted to Japan, and not instead cursing it.

Noguchi knew what the reply of the bombed-out Chinese would be. They would stoutly deny that they had ever benefited from the bombardment of the Japanese. If this "saving China" story was an obsolete one no less unconvincing was the Jap allegation that the Chinese were destroying their own houses to foist blame on the Japanese. How could any one destroy one's own cities and priceless monuments? Even the Russians who have practised scorched earth policy to perfection, removed their monuments, and destroyed only places which could be of military use to the enemy leaving intact the populated cities. They never bombed their own countrymen.

And if indeed "this burning of one's own monuments to foist the blame on the enemy" is a good war propaganda, in which the "dishonest" Chinese excelled—why don't the Japanese practise it at home. The Americans bombed military installations in Tokyo, Osaka, Yokohama and other main cities of Japan in the raid of April, 1942. Docks and ships were hit, and Japs admitted it. This performance has been repeated once again recently. Why did not the Japanese set fire to the Emperor's Palace, the Meiji Shrine, the Hibya Park, the Imperial University, and such

other places of importance in Tokyo, and then copying the Chinese, (who blamed the Japanese for destruction in their country) blame the Americans for having wrought destruction to priceless monuments and buildings of Japan. The Americans were asked to scrupulously avoid bombing public places, and they obeyed these orders implicitly. But it would have done immense good to the heart of the Americans if the Japanese as part of war propaganda had burned the palace of His Most Sacred Majesty the Son of Heaven, the Being Divine Emperor Hirehoto, and other notable places in Tokyo!

After that if Noguchi, or for that matter any other Japanese, were to repeat that Chinese burnt Nanking University, and bombed their own cities, one could say that this was within the domain of possibility! But the Japs would never do such thing, although they are known to shoot their own wounded rather than let them fall in the hands of the men of United Nations. In that case Noguchi and others must forgive the "simple" folk the world over who refuse to believe the Jap version of bombing of Chinese cities.

Under these circumstances the best course for the Japanese was to stop calling the Chinese different names such as "dishonest," "mutilated mudfish," etc. It only betrayed their bestial anger against the Chinese, and confirmed the impression that holding the opinions they did about China-

they had resorted to extermination of the Chinese race—combatants and non-combatants alike.

If they wanted to be absolved of all responsibility of atrocities in China, which the "wicked" Chinese foisted on them, then they should have followed Tagore's advice and done "good," so that good may be done to them. They had only to renounce evil and then nobody could fasten any labels to them. The Swedes, a highly industrial and efficient folk, with standard of living much higher than that prevailing in Japan, live in the heart of a war-torn Europe, and in fact very near the blood-thirsty imperialist-fascist Nazis, and the empire-owning countries such as Britain, and yet nobody has ever dreamed of calling the Swedes followers of the Nazi imperialists or accused them of wishing to build an empire like Britain. They are strong, with good navy, a modern air force, and army and yet their neighbours do not fear them. The Japanese with their high skill and industrialisation could be the Swedes of the East, without coveting the *Lebensraum* of other people. They could retire to their own small island, which is no doubt big enough to hold all their population. That was the only remedy to "propaganda" of the Chinese. But Noguchi and the Japanese of his way of thinking had no more the desire to become "good" and renounce evil, than those Japs had, about whom the Poet spoke so disparagingly in 1916, while addressing the Indian residents in

Tokyo. Instead of admitting that doing "good" was the best course for the Japanese, Noguchi questioned the *bona fides* of Tagore to talk about renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy. He said that war had been the tradition of India from the very beginning and cited the case of Siva and Kali who had both become for Indian minds the embodiment of cult of death and destruction and were worshipped for this reason. Noguchi said India could not condemn Japan, if it respected these two deities. But Noguchi forgot that this game of quoting the deities was one in which two could play. India abounded in deities, and Siva and Kali were by no means the only important deities of this country. The man, who had really shaken India out of the slumber, and who had further given a new message to Asia, was Buddha—the incarnation of peace. When people in India began to hide their misdeeds under cover of their devotion to Siva and Kali, and invoked these old mythological deities, in case of all too frequent battles waged on the Indian soil for selfish ends of petty chieftains, then Buddha stepped forward and preached the doctrine of peace. Buddha's success meant the weakening of the hold of cult of war in India. If ever after that the name of Siva and Kali was invoked it was for defensive wars, against aggression from abroad. Thus Buddhism had made it difficult for people to interpret the doctrines of Siva and Kali in an aggressive imperialist way. Civilised India,

long after it had ceased to believe in Buddhism, interpreted Siva and Kali (if at all) as deities of defensive and patriotic warfare. Later on in our own age, this faith in Sivas and Kalis has declined and people instead try to understand the scientific interpretation of the origin of world.

It was, therefore, a mistake for Noguchi to say that there was any such thing as aggressive war cult in India—which the deities Siva and Kali represented. If he were to refer to the influence of Buddha (who still remains an object of respect for millions of people), he would be nearer the mark. But how could he refer to Buddha, when the Japanese had embarked on a most ruthless campaign, in the Asiatic continent, the like of which had not been seen since the days of Tamerlane and Jenghiz Khan? Tagore could point out to Noguchi, as he had done previously in his letter to Chiang Kai-Shek, that Buddha had ceased to have any meaning for the Japanese. They were instead eulogising him as a god of war and depicting him accordingly.

Paradoxical as it may seem, while on the one hand, the poet-politician of Japan called Tagore a believer in the cult of war as preached by certain Hindu deities, on the other he asked him to intercede in the Sino-Japanese dispute. It seems it was another political manoeuvre of astute Noguchi, for how could Tagore intervene, when Japan, considered to be an aggressor by the overwhelming number of people in the world, refused to withdraw

its forces from the Chinese soil? Would it not amount to condoning of the Jap offence already committed? How would the Chinese interpret it, except as an abject surrender of his political principles, which the Poet had so far held dear? Chiang Kai-Shek and the Chinese people could agree to negotiate with Japan only when it had withdrawn its forces from their country.

No wonder then that the Poet thought Noguchi's move as utterly impracticable so far as the Chinese people were concerned.

For similar reasons he had declined to accept a friend's pressing invitation to visit Japan. He could not go there because he felt that he could not persuade the Japanese people to abandon their war policy in China. And he did not want to go to Japan, merely for sake of sightseeing—including such ghastly sights as the embarkation of Jap troops near quayside for taking part in the war in China. His natural impulse of seeing such a sight would be to ask the soldiers to desist from their "death march" towards China, and live on amicable relations with their neighbour. This the chiefs of military forces in Japan would not tolerate.

It was not year 1916, that he could think aloud in Japan, and as a distinguished foreigner have the privilege of saying things which were not at all flattering to the Nippon.

The project of this visit had therefore to be abandoned, but it has a painful similarity with the project conceived by Gandhi some

time ago. Gandhi had also expressed a wish to visit Japan, and persuade the Japs to give up their evil course in China. But he knew that Japanese would not tolerate his pacifist ideas. The Nippon had cast its Gandhis into prison or even executed them, and it had moulded its poets in the cast-iron system of dictatorship, so that a Tagore was unthinkable in Modern Japan.

The last sentence of the Poet's letter is a characteristic Tagore jib—he wished the Japanese whom he loved, not success, but remorse. Being a stout opponent of Japanese adventure in China, he could not wish them success. Besides, success would have only made them more intransigent, and they would not have sought peace, whether through the intercession of Tagore or without it. It was only in remorse that they could sue for peace-remorse, born of an utter sense of frustration, and successive failures in face of an opposition, determined to tear guts out of the militarist element among the people of Japan.

VI

War Aims and Peace Aims

With the passage of years war in the Far East entered in a second phase, that of the conflict between Britain and United States on one hand, and Japan on the other, but though the Japs have suffered numerous reverses, they have not yet followed Tagore's advice and felt remorse. The list of their misdeeds has piled up. There have been innumerable Shanghais, Nankings and Cantons all over the East, so that if Tagore were alive, he would have been busy denouncing the Jap for their new series of terrors.

However if the Japanese are not remorseful, they have learnt a good deal else from Tagore. They do not do any "good," but they no longer call all Chinese people as "dishonest", "polluted people", or "mutilated mudfish." They have subtly tried to wean away elements of Chinese on their side by soft words, and big promises of future. Wang-Ching-Wei was their puppet. This appeasement offensive which Yone Noguchi unsuccessfully tried in India, is now being carried on with re-

doubled vigour all over the East. New methods are employed, and bluntness of Yone Noguchi avoided. The Japanese do not now call those who disagree with them in certain matters as "spiritual vagabonds" as Noguchi playfully called Tagore ; unless of course such opponents happened to be arrayed among the combatants fighting the Japanese. The latest and the newest method of trickery invented by them is the following enunciation of war aims made by the Jap Foreign Minister, Mamoru Shigemitsu, before the Japanese Diet.

1. Self-defence—to safeguard Japan's proper position in the world ;
2. to establish a peaceful and harmonious family of nations by the elimination of Anglo-American oppression ;
3. to strengthen racial consciousness ;
4. to make the world's wealth in raw materials available to all nations in a spirit of collaboration ;
5. to promote cultural exchanges and mutual respect amongst traditionally civilised nations.

Yone Noguchi's tactics have been avoided, but it is only a garbled version of Jap imperialist plan. Some of the war aims are beautifully vague ; for instance, the first dealing with safeguarding of Jap defence. Who is to judge what constitutes the defence line of the Japs ? Is it not an imitation of the Americans, who recently said that they must have bases at present under occupation of the

British and the French in order to safeguard their defence against external attack? But Americans are doing so as a precaution against the attack of fascist Japs, who have played traitor to the cause of world peace. Against whom is Japan demanding these "safeguards"? Against China and America, which countries she attacked? Against Britain with whom they had friendship for several years after the abrogation of Anglo-Japanese Treaty in 1920? And what would they demand? Singapore, Sourabaya, Darwin, Port Moresby, Colombo, Rabaul, Gasmata, entire New Hebrides and Fiji, the chain of islands in the Pacific containing such bases as Truk and Saipan, Chinese and Indo-Chinese coastline, Davoe and Manila, Guam, Wake and Pearl Harbour, Aleutians, and Alaska, and even Seattle. These are the dreams of Japan. This would be perhaps their defence line! And while the Americans would be answerable to an international peace organisation, and could not use these bases for any imperialist aims, Japs would be their own bosses, do what they like, and attack India, China, America, and Australia whenever they like!

The Japs in talking about their defence betrayed a guilty conscience. They no more trusted the rest of the world than Yone Noguchi trusted China. The "proper position in the world," which Japan wished to establish was a delicate euphemism for annexation of others' territories. It seemed in matter of their first war aim the Japanese had not pro-

gressed much since the Noguchi-Tagore controversy. They remained tied to the past hide-bound with suspicion. The second war aim which dealt with Anglo-American operation was a new move in Japanese political warfare—or rather they said now openly what formerly they used to say only in undertones. But could there be any doubt after the experiences in China and elsewhere, that a Japan-dominated Asia would be any better than an Asia, in which Anglo-American domination remained intact? Why should the people of Asia exchange one master for another? Tagore had made it clear, when Noguchi referred to the imperialism of the Western countries. He told Noguchi that he would like the Japanese to shed the imperialist outlook imported from West, and thus prove themselves to be different from the Western countries. If they could do that, there could be sense in talking about Anglo-American oppression.

The third was a diabolical revival of racial madness to *n*th degree, which Tagore wanted to prevent among the Western countries. He did not like the racial superiority air which some Westerners gave themselves. But if Easterners began to think in similar terms, that would be a poor reply to the West. It would encourage racial antagonisms in both countries. Tagore envisaged a world in which there would not be racial consciousness, but the men would think themselves as one family of nations.

Before the Japanese undertook the task of strengthening racial consciousness among the people of the East, they should have purged themselves of the racial superiority taint. They should not consider themselves different from the people of the East or the world.

The fourth war aim was meant to allay the suspicions of those people, who thought that Japanese wanted to make occupied countries of Asia their sphere of influence, excluding possibility of foreign investment, or utilisation of markets of these areas on a reciprocal basis. But did they succeed in removing fears of others? How could foreign investment be possible, or utilisation of raw materials made easy if the rest of the world had to face an undefined defence line of Japan which enabled the latter to shut off the commerce of these areas whenever it pleased. Why should other countries wish to trade under the shadow of the Jap bayonets, and risk confiscation of their gold and silver, as well as forfeiture of their lives?

The fifth war aim is a belated admission of Japanese claim to be a civilised and cultured country, when Tagore has repeatedly said that the Japanese were proving themselves to be enemies of culture and civilisation. If and when Japanese learned to respect culture and paid indemnities for the destruction of cultural monuments in China and elsewhere, they might plead for cultural promotion among the countries of the world. But not till then.

To sum up then, one and all the Japanese war aims are "phoney," and run counter to all that Tagore strove for during the major portion of his life. These could never meet with his approval. It could only lead to Jap hegemony in the East. It would neither end the Anglo-American rule, nor lead to prosperity, freedom and cultural revival in the East.

Did the Poet then favour the war aims of Britain? British war aims were lofty; but they did not practise what they preached. They said that they were fighting for democracy and they would not give India the right of self-determination! Tagore's sympathies in the second phase of the war could not but be on the side of democracies, for he had been a friend of democracy and had wished British victory in the war against the Germans. But that did not mean he agreed with British war aims. He wanted Britain to put forward concrete proposals for world freedom. His war and peace aims were freedom of Asia, and of India, from all alien rule whether of Japan or of Britain. In October, 1939, he associated himself with the following statement regarding the war made by several leaders of India:

"At this supreme crisis which threatens not individual countries, but the entire fabric of civilisation, the duty of India is clear. Her sympathies are with Poland. She must stand by Britain and resist the disastrous policy of domination by force. No Indian would de-

sire even in his own country's interest that England should lose the battle for freedom she is fighting today. In that contingency the realisation of Indian independence will be retarded. India will then start a new chapter of slavery under fresh alien domination.

"To enable India to fight for others, she must be able first of all to defend herself. One of the greatest tragedies of Indian life and condition today is that she has been rendered hopelessly unarmed and untrained. The first step therefore is to mobilise the youth of the country without distinction of province, race or faith, and provide them effective military training. All must feel by deeds and not words that they are fighting on a footing of equality for the defence of their country, for the protection of their own liberty as much as of others.

"If India's duty to Britain at this crisis is clear, no less clear is England's duty to India... A new outlook is required of Britain towards India. We are ourselves without freedom, and it is not in human nature for a people in bondage to feel any real enthusiasm for fighting for the liberty of any foreign country unless they know this will lead to their own emancipation. We say this, not in a spirit of base bargain or for raising controversies at a time when unity is essential. But we consider it of supreme importance that England and India should know each other's mind without reservation. When we speak of justice to India,.... we stand pledged to the

same righteous cause for which England, France and Poland are fighting today. For the sake of peace of the world, England should not miss this great opportunity for establishing everlasting friendship with India by restoring self-rule to her in order that a free India may freely render all possible help for preservation of democracy."

The above statement contains basis from which might be elaborated the peace and war aims of India. It was a clear admission of Indian rights and aspirations, but unlike the Japanese war aims, these did not contemplate injustice to any other people. The Japanese people if they happened (which they are not) to be imbued with ideas of international fair-play rather than self-aggrandisement could see nothing amiss in what the Indian leaders headed by Tagore said. If Indians wanted to train their youth in military science, it was not because they had any undefined, limitless line of defence, "to safeguard India's position in the world." It was only to defend their home and hearth. The position they wanted in the world was not one of domination over other people but of equality.

They knew once they had won freedom and equality, they would gain immeasurably in respect of other people of the world, and there would be no need for any superimposed "prestige" to show off India as a very strong power. Such hankering after prestige only betrayed inferiority complex and that was what India did not want. Indian leaders

wanted to end the inferiority complex and not encourage it.

Similarly Japanese tirades against Anglo-American oppression were considered useless in India. If India had freedom, why continue tirades against England and America: and why keep alive racial antagonisms? Indian leaders have therefore in the above statement demanded freedom in order that they might fight shoulder to shoulder with their allies England and America. Ultimate co-operation with these two countries was the Indian war and peace aim. They did not indulge in any tall talk about economic and cultural co-operation between civilised countries. Indians have always encouraged such co-operation and they took it for granted as a condition of world peace and freedom. There could not be any question of India having put a ban on cultural and economic co-operation with other nations in the past, and then all of a sudden turned pious and recanted it. The Japanese had been trying to shut off East to those Westerners who sought economic and cultural contact with it, and had now recanted. For them this cultural-cum-economic co-operation idea was something new (though they were hardly sincere about it), for India, it was not. Therefore it was not stressed in the above statement.

This concerted move of Indian leaders could not but evoke sympathy among the progressive people all over the world. That

was why Tagore had joined other leaders in issuing this statement.

But while Tagore collaborated with other Indian leaders, in a matter of foreign policy towards the Axis, he tended more and more to leave everything to Gandhi, who he thought was carrying on faithfully his life mission in politics. In spite of many differences among them the two leaders had similar views about international policy and peace and war aims of India. This was made clear by Tagore when he said :

"The conscience of the world has been profoundly shocked at the latest manifestation of the arrogant unrighteousness of the present ruler of Germany; this is but the culmination of a long series of intimidation of the weak, from the suppression of the Jewish people in the Reich to the rape of the gallant and truly liberal state of Czechoslovakia.

"Through the mouth of Mahatma Gandhi, the voice of my country has already been raised in moral condemnation of the inhumanity which has plunged the world in this insensate carnage to satisfy the vain-glorious whims of an individual and his associates. Our voice may not perhaps reach the ears of the faction in power in Germany, for it is not borne on the wings of high explosive shells. I can only hope that humanity may emerge triumphant and the decencies of life and freedom for the oppressed people may be firmly established for all time to come

in a world purified through this terrible bath of blood.” ’

Though Tagore was referring to Gandhi's attitude towards Germany, in his eyes Japan and Germany represented one cause and both were devil's disciples. Hitting one was therefore hitting the other. What Gandhi said about Germany could be said about Japan.

Thus Tagore had made a public avowal of his faith in the political policy of Gandhi—the internationalist. The former outlined India's peace and war aims, which had no resemblance to those now enunciated by the Japanese. It would be the task of the latter to take up the thread where Tagore left it, and guide India's policy towards Japan in keeping with the traditions of Tagore.

VII

Stop the Jap

If Tagore revealed immense faith in Gandhi's international policy of resistance to the aggressors, there were other points of agreement between the two leaders. Both wanted a speedy annihilation of Jap militarism. Peace aims and war aims, a country ought to have, but these must remain "good" on paper only, so long as the aggressor is not knocked out. Gandhi had expressed sympathy with China, and before his arrest pleaded for early liquidation of the Japanese power, after alliance had been concluded between England and India.

He has been saying the same thing since his release from prison. Tagore denounced the halting, hesitating, and fickle attitude of the Western Powers in his letter to Chiang Kai-Shek. That was the first indication of his impatience with the war of attrition against Japan. In 1939 after the outbreak of war in a letter to a friend he again held up to ridicule the attitude of those countries which did not act speedily to crush the

Japanese:

"With anguished heart I have seen how a great imperial power, in supine indifference, has allowed China to be swallowed morsel by morsel and disappear in the jaws of Japan, and at last from Japan itself came ugly insults such as imperialism sheltered by its Eastern throne had never experienced. That vain-glorious empire, again, idly watched Italy devour Abyssinia, and helped Germany in amity's name to crush Czechoslovakia under mailed boots. We saw how pursuing a crooked 'non-intervention' policy she reduced Republican Spain to destitution and after bowing her head at Munich waved Hitler's signature with ignoble joy. By sacrificing her dignity and neglecting her honour she gained nothing herself but at each step strengthened the hands of her enemy finally having to plunge in this terrific war. In this war, I earnestly hope, England and France would win; the disgrace of civilisation by Fascism and Nazism has become intolerable. But it is for China I suffer most; the empire-builders have enormous power and wealth which could be brought to help her, but China fights alone, almost empty-handed, with indomitable courage as her ally."

Mounting bitterness against the imperialist Powers is the outstanding feature of Tagore's above denunciation. He was bitter in 1916, 1937, 1938 (in his letter to Noguchi) and now in 1939 he was even more aggrieved and had become if anything more outspoken.

The reason was that imperialist Powers had not only cold-shouldered China, but had earned odium of the world for the sad murder of the Spanish and Czechoslovak republics. Rabindranath was no less concerned about the fate of these countries than he was about that of China, where the child of appeasement was still being nursed. He was convinced that the imperialist countries were committing one mad folly after the other, and as China was still struggling valiantly, while lights had gone out in Europe, he appealed once again to the mind of the civilised world to prevent China from being sent to the wall. There was according to him one more reason for doing the right thing by China at that late hour, and that was the Japanese had resorted to worst imaginable tactics to continue their one way slander-traffic against the Western countries. These reached their climax in the brutalities committed at Tienstien against civilians of Western countries. Tagore was referring to them. This, he said, was the reason why Japan must be crushed. Influential people in England favoured this Tagore plan of all-out help to China to give knock-out blow to Japan. One of these was Sir Norman Angell, an influential British liberal, winner of Nobel Peace Prize, and untiring worker in the cause of world peace. Tagore in the above letter referred to him in the following words:

".....I have read Sir Norman Angell's comment in *Time and Tide* on the present

situation. Lord Halifax, he says, referred last week to Great Britain's war aims: 'We are demonstrating by word and deed our will to defend the freedom of nations which are immediately threatened. For this reason, we are ready to take the side of Poland. If we do not agree to maintain the freedom of other nations, then the principle of freedom will be betrayed, and along with it our own freedom.'

"Praising this statement of Lord Halifax, Sir Norman adds: 'But this principle of freedom which has been attacked in Poland was also attacked in Manchuria, Abyssinia, China, Spain and Czechoslovakia. In regard to all these countries, however, Great Britain betrayed by word and deed its responsibility to protect them.'

"Do go through the whole of Sir Norman's discussion. One more proof of the difference that lies between the little and the great Englishman. When the diminutive variety sits on a high pedestal and rules, not only is that country's glory shed, but its self-interest vitally injured.

"Some hints contained in Sir Norman's article alarmed me. Rumour is rife in different quarters, he said, that since Japan has lost faith in Germany (temporarily as a result of Russo-German pact of non-aggression) Great Britain should at once make it up with Japan, and push China to the wall. Says Sir Norman, 'Now to sacrifice China to Japan would be to revert to appeasement in its most evil form. And we are in danger of

doing it from sheer moral obtuseness.' We in India can add that, if groups of English people want now to establish safe friendly relations with Japan, we shall know then to what depths the nation's self-respect has sunk."

Sir Norman's hatred of Japan is equal to that expressed by Tagore, and both agreed about speedy liquidation of the Japanese pest. But while Tagore had in view a free Independent India playing an equal part with Britain in ending of Jap scourge, Sir Norman was also concerned about India's freedom. Though of course it must be admitted that Sir Norman has not played any conspicuous part in the agitation going on in Britain on India's behalf. India has not been for him a burning problem of the day, that he should at risk of unpopularity in tory circles, devote himself to this all-important matter. This is surprising in view of the fact that Sir Norman had not cared in the past for unpopularity among certain elements, and particularly in 1935, he was responsible for the famous peace pledge ballot which delighted the liberals and socialists, but which annoyed the tories very much. One wishes that Sir Norman in matter of Indian freedom played a similar dauntless role.

As it was, to Tagore went the honour of being one of the few Nobel Prize winners and world-famed figures, who had voiced his demand for freedom of India, as well as the speedy liquidation of the Jap pest. Sir Norman was nowhere in this group of inter-

nationalists which was, alas, being reduced to small numbers by the stern hand of death. Now of course many more such prominent people are joining this group, and it may again become strong having gained in numbers.

At that time Tagore realised that he had to face heavy odds in voicing this twin demand. He had said :

"We in India are being debarred from accepting these challenges ; had our fate been favourable, we could have associated with history's chess-board as players rather than pawns. We have steadily lost our individuality, how can we now in our crippled state join a world war, holy or unholy? Rather than indulge in mimic or slavish gestures, I would rather take refuge in what you would call my poetic escapism."

The Poet then steadily disillusioned with the world, which did not act in international and national affairs with the speed which Tagore thought as requisite for banishing slavery off the face of earth, turned to the domain of words and thoughts and sought to express himself in poetry. He wrote :

"A poet's ultimatum, remember, was delivered already during the cataclysm of the last war ; the answer to it will not come just yet ; the last date for answer is perhaps centuries hence.

"Greed's hungry flames mount ever higher.

As evil ego's appetite is fed ;

The universe it demands as its victual,
Monstrous food, mercilessly shames
 monstrous hunger—
And then O Terrible, with terrific
 clash your thunder descends.”
 (Fruit Gathering)

And also in another poem :

"Whom do you blame, brothers?"

Bow you heads down !

The sin has been yours and ours.

The heat growing in the heart of God
for ages—

The cowardice of the weak, the arrogance of the strong, the greed of fat prosperity,

The rancour of the wronged, pride of
race, and insult to man—

Has burst God's peace raging in storm."
(*Fruit Gathering*)

This may not be as good anti-fascist poetry as Messrs. Day Lewis, Lious Macniece, and Auden have written, but it certainly represented the deep sentiments of horror about the war and the march of fascism felt by a poet, whose life had been steeped in international tradition, and who had towards the end of his life imbued his poetry in the same spirit. This poetry is, therefore, as much important for the anti-fascist cause as the fireworks of the younger poets, who were dyed in the deepest red dye. It would inspire anti-fascists all over the world. It was certainly not mere poetic escapism as Tagore modestly put it. It should prove as much

useful in ending the Jap menace speedily and ushering in a dawn of freedom in India, as his prose writings on this subject would. Whether Tagore seeks escape in the world of poetry, or addresses Chiang Kai-Shek, or Noguchi or the Japanese or Chinese people, the refrain of his talk remains—No quarter to the Japs, and stop them, or they will not stop anywhere, once let loose over the world. If his words were unheeded while he lived, these might be made better use of now that he is no more and the East is in need of guidance from him as before.