INDIA AND CEYLON

BY

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The subject of the following address is the relation between India and Ceylon, i. e. not so much the economic and political relations which are at present beyond our control, but rather the mental and spiritual relation. Is Ceylon in the future to belong in these respects to India or to Europe ? Is India to be our motherland still or shall we prosper more as orphans ? That is the question which is urgent to-day in Ceylon and upon the answer to it depends every aspect of the future worth considering.

It is not a question of whether or not to accept this or the other mechanical aid to comfortable living produced amongst other nations not a question of whether to preserve or destroy the caste system or the purdah, not a question merely of diet or dress. but a question of mental attitude and bent of mind. That changes are absolutely necessary if the East is to regain efficiency under the altered conditions of to-day and to-morrow is certain. Evidently past greatness is no guarantee even of future mediocrity. Our social institutions have decayed ; neither wealth nor power remains in the hands of those who once possessed them ; arts. industries and science are at the lowest level. We are no longer producers either commercially or mentally but mere consumers ; it is evident that such a position cannot be indefinitely maintained and is. at the best, an unworthy one. Change and fundamental change, is needed ; some change has already taken place ; if the result has thitherto been disappointing. is it because we have not yet learnt the real lessons which the foreigner has to teach us? Or is it because we have surrendered ourselves too unreservedly and have run too much after some new thing ?

There is truth in both points of view. So far as we have retained the past, with its mixture of good and bad, it has been prejudice that has led us to do so ; so far as we have accepted the new, with its mixture of good and bad, it has been partly hypnotism, partly I fear, snobbishness that has been at work Evidently such ruling ideas are not likely to contribute to a preservation of what is best in the old life or an acceptance of what is best in the new. We return to the position that the question is not one of detail but of mental attitude.

Do we really believe that we have the elements of greatness in us and can do in the future work as good as we have done in the past? Whatever we believe of ourselves, we already are potentially; if we really believe that we have just emerged from centuries of barbarism and darkness into civilization and light, we shall occupy the position which belongs only to races that have actually no past, and which, in so far as they do not accept modern conditions are doomed to physical extinction or mental insignificance. But if we realize that India in the past has been the chief factor in the growth of civilization and culture, and that in that work even Ceylon has played no insignificant part, we shall also realise that the East contains within itself all the elements of self-recovery. There has been no aspect of life or culture in which India has not at one time or another excelled, and in many directions she has established positions which must remain for over unshakeable. There is no reform needed to-day that has not been realised to a greater or less extent in some part of India or at some period in her history, or which has not been preached by Indians before even the modern West was known to her. Even from the varied elements composing the life of India to-day could be built up the structure of an ideal life. Bengal, the Punjab, and the South have each its peculiar virtue : the Sikh, the Mohammedan and the orthodox Hindu have lessons for us. There are parts of India where there is no Purdah, races whose children do not marry in early childhood, places where indigenous manufactures still flourish, where great architecture is still understood where real music can still be heard ; there are still seats of oriental learning

and literary activity; there are conservative people who preserve old customs, and bold experimenters who have made radical changes and adopted many new customs; there are practical business men and others whose only concern is with metaphysical speculation—India even to-day is an open book for us to study. And the reason why we should study it even more closely than the open book of Europe is this, that our very own difficulties and doubts exist for India. As they do for us, and they will be solved ultimately in the Indian way; for whatever we do, we may be sure that India herself will not permanently be beguiled, but will strike out her own path afresh and fulfil her own destiny. India will be true to herself; but more than that, if we trust her, India will be true to us.

It may be true probably is true, that the shock of Western influence was needed to waken India to herself, and that foreign rule is now for the second time helping the people of India to realise their geographical and historical unity. But these external impulses are but the touch upon the trigger, the reaction must come from India herself. Questions innumerable claim immediate solution; we must either solve them in our own way or they will be to all intents and purposes unsolved. The acceptance of ready-made solutions, adapted to other conditions as they are, spells mental slavery and commercial subjection. If the ideal of civilization is not the domination of one race by another, but the existence of independent nationalities, with in each case special functions and duties, we must justify our right to live by doing something more than wearing English clothes and reading Shakespeare and Milton. That is to say, we must preserve the Indian mental attitude and not endeavour to acquire the European Now it is my chief aim herein to emphasize the fact that this is not merely a privilege but a duty. India's contribution to civilization in the past does not and can never justify her in thinking that her work is done. There is yet work for her to do which, if not done by her, will remain for ever undone. In the organization of the whole art of life under changed conditions India must act and think for herself—and in so doing, for us, if we will but join hands with her now.

In social organization, in music, art and literature, it remains for India to express, with the added power of modern knowledge, all that her best and noblest have dreamed of in the past. No others can do this work for her ; but it is work in which we have a right to share, for as we are but a part of India's past so have we a right to be a part of India's future. And to take our share in this work is a binding duty which we cannot honourably evade. It is nothing to the point that the work of others seems to us more brilliant and more attractive ; it is enough that it is not the work we are called upon to do – sreyan swadharmmo vigunah paradharmmatswanushtitat – better is one's own duty, though insignificant, than even the well executed duty of another. The shame of hospitality refused is ours ; many have come to our mother's house with reverence for her past, willing to learn from her now, but have been sent empty away. There is not in India to-day that which the world has a right to expect from a great people. The student of social economy finds a highly organised society in the process of disintegration, without any of the serious and consistent constructive effort required for reorganization under changed conditions ; the student of architecture finds indeed a great past but in the present merely the copy of a style that belonged to the people of a European state two thousand years ago and, as far as domestic architecture is concerned, merely an echo of London villadom ; the student of fine art finds no new interpretation of nature seen through other eyes, but only tasteless copies of the second – rate work of his own country ; the decorative artist sees only the worst features of the early Victorian period of English art intensified and perpetuated ; the musician is hardly aware that anything better than the gramophone and the harmonium exists in the land ; the religious man finds the chief shrines dedicated to the great god of 'gettingon'. The lover of freedom sees a people who can be imprisoned for indefinite periods without trial ; in short every man who seeks to widen his own outlook finds only his own face distorted in the mirror of modern India The stranger has asked for bread, and we have given him a stone. Therefore I say we have failed in hospitality and duty.

I here digress to notice an objection sometimes made to the ideal of nationality viz. that it involves an accentuation of the differences between men and so hinders a realization of the brotherhood and unity of humanity. This objection is at once so subtle and so commonplace as to be hard of answering. The difficulty only arises when it is forgotten that nationalism implies internationalism It is a case of 'live and let live'. Nationalism is essentially altruistic – it is a people's recognition of its own special function and place in the civilized world ; internationalism is the recognition of the rights of others to their self-development, and of the incompleteness of the civilized world if their special culture—contribution is missing. A nationalism which does not recognize these rights and duties of others but attempts to aggrandize itself at their expense, becomes no longer nationalism, but a disease, generally called Imperialism.

A further suggestion of the true answer to the objection may be given thus-Does a mother love a son less because he is less like hereself than a daughter? Or does a man love a woman less because of her difference from himself? Of course not. The truth is that what we seek in others is not our own reflection in a mirror, but another, and to some extent complementary, range of qualities So long as we demand likeness there is no room for sympathy It is then a duty to offer to each other the fullest expression of ourselves, for in no other way can we fully give ourselves to others and earn their love

At present it is difficult for a foreigner in India to respect a people whose modern representatives can contribute little to his mental outlook, and can extend but very slightly the range of his experience; and without respect, how can there be brotherhood? Therefore a realisation of the ideals of nationalism and internationalism is essential for India and Ceylon if it be brotherhood that we desire to promote. Some realisation of these facts is taking place in India to-day, a stirring of the dry bones is heard. Nor is this an isolated phenomenon· nationalities in other parts of the world are awakening to a sense both of rights and responsibilities. But the most remarkable and significant of these

awakenings to national self consciousness of modern times will have taken place when the peoples of India awake to a full recognition of the fundamental unity that binds them together more firmly than any superficial diversities can ultimately separate them To the student of history, literature, or art, this unity appears more clearly marked than that which binds together the different parts of Europe. The wars between European states have been the wars of one nation upon another; the wars of India have been either petty civil wars or wars of invasion from without. Each successive wave of invasion, until the last, has broken in the north and spent itself as it passed onwards to the south. Each group of invaders has settled in the country and has become a part of India. All have become Indians. Only in the case of Mohammedans the process is hardly complete, and the case of the English has not begun and will probably not take place. Each successive group of invaders has made some addition to the mental world of India, some contribution to her art or her philosophy, contributions fulfilling the completeness and versatility of the Indian outlook upon life. "Every province within the vast boundaries fulfils some necessary part in the completion of a nationality. No one place repeats the specialised functions of another" Especially does this apply to Ceylon. India without Ceylon is incomplete, Ceylon is unique as the home of Pali literature and Southern Buddhism, and as possessing a continuous chronicle invaluable as a check upon the uncertain data of Indian history Ceylon is a more perfect window through which to gaze on India's past than can be found in India itself. Not only are its art and literature and religion free from Mohammedan influence, but they are merely influenced and not completely dominated by later Hindu conceptions, and actually preserve and reflect something of Hindu and Buddhist culture as it existed in that period of mental activity when Asoka just grasped the idea of Indian unity and of fraternity amongst its component parts, by sending friendly missions far and wide throughout its borders. For very many centuries the relations between South India and Ceylon resembled those between England and France in the early middle ages alternate warfare and

close alliance. The nobler of the two great Indian epics unites India with Ceylon in the mind of every Indian, and Sita is known from the remotest north of India to the extreme south and there in Ceylon her name is given to many places where she is thought to have rested in her exile In later times the histories of Northern India and Ceylon were linked by Vijaya's emigration and then by Asoka's missions and later still Padmavati became a Rajput bride and perished by fire like many another Rajput lady when death or dishonour was the only choice; and to this day her name is on the lips of the peoples of Northern India as the very flower and crown of all beauty, even as Deirdre's is in Ireland still.

Not only, then, is Ceylon bound to India by every mental and spiritual tie but there is no part of herself which India can so ill afford to lose. Surely it is our duty to identify ourselves with the mental and spiritual development of the motherland in the future too.

So far I have laid emphasis on nationalism as a duty binding upon us in two ways a duty to the world at large, and a duty to India. It is a duty to ourselves too. Intellectual considerations alone should suffice to determine our attitude towards the questions propounded at the beginning of this address. But a consideration from the merely economic point of view will lead to the same result In the first place. it is difficult to see how a people so rooted in the Indian past that there is scarcely an element in their life that is comprehensible without some understanding of India, can profitably cut themselves adrift from that mental atmosphere and progress under influences indifferent to or actively hostile to the past. As well expect the severed branches of the vine to bear fruit, or a water-loving plant to grow in sandy soil. So surely as an entirely foreign system of education and an alien culture are forced upon us, and as long as we keep up the present barrier between our present and our past, so long will more or less of mental sterilisation and loss of originality result. The only way of progress is to develop the people's intelligence through the medium of their own national culture. European culture,

when it replaces, instead of supplementing Eastern culture, does not develop the people's intelligence but the very contrary.

All of these and other problems are urgent everywhere too in India and if we are willing to put ourselves in closer touch with India to-day we can learn much of how they are to be met. For instance in Calcutta. there exists the Bangiya-Sahitya-Parishad or Bengal Academy of Literature, which publishes texts, collects MSS. is compiling a dictionary etc. (Would that we had a body of literati who would combine to issue a Sinhalese dictionary! As the result of. or at any rate following upon their respresentation, the Bengal Government in 1901 "condemned in very strong language the existing practice of using English as the medium of instruction for the subjects taught to the lower classes of English high schools, and directed that in all Government schools the medium of instruction in the lowest classes would henceforth be the vernacular and that this would be a condition of aid to the aided schools" vide Calcutta Gazette. Jan. 2, 1901). Next came the Government of India with their sweeping condemnation of the existing practice. In their resolution, dated the 11th March. 1904, on Indian educational policy. occurs the following passage- 'As a general rule, a child should not be allowed to learn English as a language until he has made some progress in the primary stages of instruction and has received a thorough grounding in his mother tongue It is equally important that when the teaching of English has begun, it should not be prematurely employed as the medium of instruction in other subjects..... The line of division between the use of the vernacular and of English as the mediums of instruction should, broadly speaking, be drawn at a minimum age of 13. No scholar in a secondary school should even then be allowed to abandon the study of his vernacular, which should be kept up until the end of school course. Such are the views not merely of Indians, but of the Indian Government, Have we nothing to learn from India herein?

The University of Calcutta has not yet moved far in the direction of encouraging vernacular studies; but the

Indian Universities Commission have spoken strongly on the subject. In their report occur the words "We also think that vernacular composition should be made compulsory in every stage of the B. A. course" This liberal attitude is certainly partly due to the existence of the Bengal Academy of Literature and of similar bodies. All over India there are such institutions and they are to some extent in touch with each other. How much it would quicken our intellectual life and strengthen our hands, if we kept ourselves abreast of Indian progress and in touch with Indian organizations of this character.

This brings us to the last part of this address, viz., the consideration of practical steps that may be taken to bring us into closer touch with India. There is, first, the the study of Indian history and literature essential, in any case, to the right appreciation of our own. Equal in importance to this education of the historical sense in us, is the need for the education of the geographical sense. In former times this was to some extent accomplished by means of religious pilgrimages. These are less often undertaken now and the easier means of conveyance available lessen the educational value also. Nevertheless, travelling in India is the very best method of putting oneself in touch with modern Indians. In the course of a tour in India recently, I have everywhere found a welcome for one from distant parts and have been much struck by the great strengthening of the feeling of brother hood and unity in India and strengthening of the Indian idea generally, which may result from more extended acquaintances amongst Indians from distant parts. Misapprehensions are removed and friendships made. On this account and on account of the educational value of such travel, no Indian or Ceylonese should deem his Indian education complete, if he has not, very much in the pilgrim spirit, visited some of the historic sites of India, and made the acquaintances of other Indian peoples Such travel would be of far more value for instance, than a hasty visit to Europe.

There is another way in which we should put ourselves in touch with India, that is by sending at least one

representative to the Congress. It is true that the Congress is mainly a political organization, and we affect to be proud of our isolation from Indian politics This is perhaps an unwise position, for we cannot but be helped by a consideration of the attempts of others to solve problems similar to our own. But the Congress is not merely political - there are Industrial and Social sections of great importance where questions vital to ourselves also are debated In such respects we have much to learn from the counsel of others; and perhaps could be of use too, for in the multitude of counsellors is wisdom.

Again we may take in Indian papers and magazines- this could easily be arranged on the lines of a small Reading Room in Colombo, by means of exchanges for our own Review.

Finally, we may send some of our young men to study at Indian Universities and they will return to us with a first hand knowledge of modern India and her needs and aspirations, such as we cannot acquire by reading or even by travel.

Such briefly, are the obvious means of putting ourselves in touch with the Motherland. As to the need for doing so, that has been already spoken of. Of one thing I am sure, that is, that in so far as we endeavour to alienate ourselves from India and our Indian past, and blindly imitate the European present, so long shall we be failing in duty, and to the same degree shall we assure our own ultimate insignificance.

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