ESSAY

# SWADESH

Rabindranath Tagore

# Contents

THE NEW AND THE OLD.....2
THE DIFFERENCE OF SOCIETIES .....19
AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE MORAL SENSE.....25

# THE NEW AND THE OLD

We are the ancient people of India; very old, very weary. I often feel within myself that vast racial antiquity of ours. When I look searchingly into my own heart, I find there only thought, and rest, and renunciation. It is as though a long holiday stretches within, while outside the world goes on. It is as though, in the morning of the world, we had already finished our day's business at the office, so that now, in this heated noontide, when all others are still occupied with their labours, we have shut our doors and are resting undisturbed—having drawn our full wages and resigned from service, we now live out our days upon a pension. We are quite content.

Then suddenly it was discovered that circumstances had changed. The lease of grace we had held from time immemorial has been confiscated by the new king's government, since we could produce no valid title-deed for it. Suddenly we are poor. As the world's other tenant-farmers toil and pay their rent, so must we now do. The ancient race has had to begin, all at once, a new endeavour.

Therefore—set aside thought, set aside rest, abandon the corner of the house; grammar and logic, scripture and tradition, and the small daily duties of the household, will no longer serve; break up the hard clods of earth, make the soil fertile, and pay revenue to the new human king; go to college, dine in hotels, and take up office employment.

Alas, who was it that broke down India's ancient ramparts and set us down, staring, in the midst of this vast, unsheltered field of labour? We had built mental embankments on every side, damming the flow of time, and had arranged everything to our own liking, and sat ourselves down within it. The restless tides of change roared ceaselessly outside India's borders like an ocean, while we, established in unshaken stillness, had forgotten the very existence of the moving, universal world. Then, through some breach, the ever-restless human flood entered among us and dashed everything to pieces,

mingling the new with the old, bringing doubt into faith, casting the sting of vain longing into the midst of contentment—overturning everything.

Suppose that the barriers of the Himalayas and of the sea around us had been even more impassable than they were: then a people might have found leisure, within some unknown and secluded enclosure, to attain in calm tranquillity a kind of narrow completeness. They would have known very little of the world's tidings, and would have held the most imperfect notions of geography; only their poetry, their social order, their scriptures, their philosophy, would have attained an unrivalled grace, harmony, and completeness. They would have lived, as it were, upon another small planet apart from the earth; their history, their knowledge and learning, their happiness and prosperity, would have been sufficient unto themselves. Just as a portion of the sea, in the course of time enclosed by land, gives rise to a secluded, peaceful, beautiful lake—which glows, unrippled, with the varied colours of dawn and dusk, and at night lies sunk, motionless, in the dim starlight, absorbed in eternal mystery—

so it might have been with us. In the swift current of time, at the very centre of the tumult of change, in the midst of the battlefield of nature's myriad forces, one gains, no doubt, a rough sort of education and civilisation through being buffeted about; but how shall I say what treasures cannot be gathered except by descending into solitude, silence, and depth?

In this restless ocean of the world, no nation has ever found the leisure of that stillness. It seems that India alone, by some strange decree of fate, once attained that isolation from the whole earth and plunged into its unfathomable depths. As the universe is infinite, so too is the soul of man infinite; and it is the words of the utterly faithless that would claim that those who sought the path into that unexplored inner realm discovered no new truth, no new joy there.

India then was like a closed, secluded, mysterious laboratory; within it a strange and secret experiment in mental civilisation was being conducted. Just as the alchemists of medieval Europe, shut away in hidden chambers, sought through various curious apparatus to discover the elixir of eternal life, so too our sages, with the same secret vigilance, sought the means of attaining spiritual immortality. They asked, "*Yenāham nāmṛtā syām kimaham tena kuryām*"—"What should I do with that by which I do not become immortal?"—and by means most difficult of attainment, set themselves to search within for that nectar of deathlessness.

What might have come of it, who can say? Just as chemistry arose out of alchemy, so who now can tell what hidden new power of man might have emerged from that austere discipline?

But suddenly the door was broken down, and the rude intruder from outside forced his way into that sacred laboratory of India, and the fruit of that long inquiry remained forever unrevealed to the world. Whether such tranquil leisure for experiment will ever again be granted amid this new, headlong civilisation, who can say?

What did the people of the world see when they entered that laboratory? A wasted ascetic; without garment, without ornament, without knowledge of the world's history. Whatever he wished to say had, as yet, no language that could be readily grasped, no proof that could be directly perceived, no result that could be practically applied.

Therefore—O old man, O ever-afflicted one, O indifferent one, arise! Take up political agitation, or else, lying abed, proclaim the glories of your vanished youth and rattle your withered bones—see whether that dispels your shame or not.

But I have no inclination for that. I dare not set sail upon this perilous ocean of the world merely by unfurling the sail of a newspaper. When the breeze blows soft and favourable, this paper sail swells proudly enough, but who knows when the storm will rise from the sea, and the frail mast be shattered into a hundred pieces.

If only it were the case that somewhere nearby there existed a well-established harbour called Progress, and that once one somehow reached it, all the rest followed of its own accord—come what may, "let it be given, let it be enjoyed"—even then one might, watching the sky for a favourable moment, attempt the crossing with great cunning. But when I know that this voyage of progress has no end at all, that nowhere is there a place to moor one's boat and sleep, that overhead only the pole-star glimmers and ahead lies only the shoreless sea, that the wind is more often than not contrary and the waves are always fierce—then how can one feel any inclination merely to sit and build paper boats of straw?

And yet the desire to launch a boat remains. When I see the flood of humanity moving on—on every side the varied clamour, the wild momentum, the powerful

motion, the ceaseless labour—my own heart, too, leaps up. Then I long to break the bonds of home built over long years and step outright into the open. But the very next moment, gazing at my empty hands, I wonder where the provisions for such a journey are to come from. Where is that boundless hope in the heart, that untiring strength in life, that irresistible power of faith? Then surely this obscurity at the world's edge is best for us, this small contentment and lifeless peace our rightful portion.

Then, sitting quietly, I console myself with the thought that though we cannot build machines, though we cannot uncover all the world's hidden secrets, yet we can love, we can forgive, we can make room for one another. What need is there to wear ourselves out chasing after impossible desires? Let it be—we shall remain where we are; if our name never rises upon the world-proclaiming pillar of the *Times*, so be it.

But there is suffering, there is poverty, there is the tyranny of the strong, there is the humiliation that falls to the lot of the helpless; sitting in a corner, occupied only with household duties and hospitality, how shall one remedy any of that?

Alas, that indeed is India's unbearable sorrow. Against whom shall we wage war? Against the eternal cruelty ingrained in human nature itself! Against that stone which even the sacred blood of Christ has not yet been able to soften into tenderness! Strength is forever merciless toward weakness—how shall we conquer that primal, bestial nature? By holding meetings? By petitioning? By receiving today a little alms, tomorrow a scolding? That can never be.

Well then—shall we become as strong as the strong? That, perhaps, might be possible. But when I consider how immensely powerful Europe is, and for how many reasons powerful—when once I fully and truly feel, in my very bones, this formidable strength—what hope remains? Then it seems to me: come, brother, let us rather be patient, and love, and do good. Whatever little work we do in this world, let it be done in earnest, not in pretence. The chief danger of incapacity is this: that because it cannot do great things, it comes to regard great pretence as preferable. It does not know that, for the attainment of true manhood, a small truth is worth far more than a great falsehood.

But it is not my intention to preach. I am only trying to see what the real state of things is. And to see that, it is not necessary to open the old Vedas, Puranas, and scriptures and, gathering together whatever pleases one's fancy, construct some imaginary golden age; nor is it necessary to dissolve ourselves, through fancy, into the nature and history of some other people and build, upon the frail foundation of our new education, a vast fortress of impossible ambition. What is needed is to see where we now actually stand. Where we are placed, mirages of the past come drifting from the east, and mirages of the future from the west; let us, without taking either of these two as wholly reliable truth, look once to see upon what real ground our feet are actually planted.

We dwell in an exceedingly ancient, decaying city; so ancient that its history has almost vanished; the hand-written records of men lie buried beneath moss; so much so that one might mistake this city for something older than human history itself, an ancient capital of nature herself, without beginning. Effacing the outlines of human chronicle, nature has adorned its every part, in her own green script, with manifold designs. Here a thousand years of monsoon rains have left the trace of their tears, and a thousand years of springs have inscribed, in letters of yellow-green, the date of their passing upon every crevice of its walls. From one point of view it might be called a city; from another, a forest. Here only shadow and repose, thought and melancholy, can dwell. Amid these forest-murmuring, cricket-echoing groves, amid these tangled, moss-laden branches and the mysterious foundations of ancient buildings, one is led to mistake shadow for substance and substance itself for shadow. Amid this primeval great shade, truth and imagination have taken shelter together, without discord, like brother and sister; that is to say, the universal workings of nature and the mental creations of man have become so interwoven and intertwined as to form groves of shadow of every variety of shape. Here children play all day but do not know it as play, and grown men dream night and day but believe it to be labour. The noonday sun of the world, entering through some chink, appears only as tiny scattered jewels; the fierce storm, checked among a hundred narrow entanglements of branches, subsides into a mere soft murmur by the time it reaches within. Here the boundary-lines between life and death, joy and sorrow, hope and despair, have grown faint and blurred; fatalism and active endeavour, renunciation and worldly life, flow on together side by side. The necessary and the unnecessary, the divine and the clay idol, the withered, rootless past and the living present bursting with fresh shoots, receive here equal honour. Wherever the scripture lies, there it lies still; and where, covering the scripture, the

ancient anthill of a thousand customs has risen up, there too no one, in lazy devotion, lifts a hand to disturb it. The letters of the book and the borings of the bookworm are here equally venerable scripture. In the crumbling, peepul-split temples here, gods and demigods alike have taken shelter together and dwell in peace.

Is this, then, a fit place for you to pitch the martial camp of your world-battle! Are these crumbling foundations fit ground on which to build your factories, your prisons for the fire-breathing, hundred-armed iron demons! With the force of your restless enterprise you might indeed raze these ancient bricks to the ground—but where, then, would this most ancient of the world's sleeping peoples go and stand? If this motionless, dense forest-city were destroyed, then even that aged Brahma-demon who has taken his eternally secluded dwelling here through a thousand dead years would suddenly find himself without shelter.

These people have not, for a very long time, built their own houses with their own hands; that habit is not theirs—and this, indeed, is the one great pride of their more thoughtful men. That the words with which they brandish their pens are entirely true, no one can dispute. In truth, these people have never had to abandon the ancestral foundation laid down by their earliest forefathers. In the course of time, many discrepancies of circumstance, many new conveniences and inconveniences, have arisen; but, drawing all of these together—the dead and the living, the convenient and the inconvenient—they have laboured with all their might to include everything within that one foundation established by the forefathers. Not even from the mouths of their enemies is it heard that these people have ever, out of mere inconvenience, presumed to build a new house with their own hands, or repair the old one. Where a gap has appeared in the roof, the untended branch of a banyan tree has occasionally lent its shade, and the earth accumulated by time has here and there stopped up the breach.

In this forest bereft of its sylvan spirit, in this ruined mansion bereft of its guardian deity, we move about very softly, wrapped in our dhoti and shawl; after eating, we take a little nap; sitting in the shade, we play at cards and dice; whatever is impossible and lies outside the range of worldly affairs, that we love to believe most readily; whatever is practical and visible to the eye, our minds can never quite bring themselves fully to trust; and if, on top of all this, some boy shows the slightest sign

of restlessness, we all shake our heads together and pronounce: "All excessive zeal is contemptible."

At such a time, you people come suddenly from somewhere and, giving our decrepit ribs two or three sharp jabs, say: Get up, get up; we wish to set up our office in your bedchamber. It is not the case that, because you have been asleep, the whole world has been asleep too. Meanwhile much has changed in the world. That bell is ringing; it is now noon in the world, now the hour for work.

Hearing this, some among us start up in confusion, crying "Where's the work, where's the work!" and rush about busily into every corner of the house; and among these, those of somewhat stout and swollen disposition turn over on their sides and say: Now then! Who talks of work? Do you mean to suggest we are not men of action? What a monstrous error!

There is no place for labour anywhere except in India. Consider—was it not here, in the very first age of human history, that the great war of the Aryan races was fought? Was it not here that so many kingdoms rose, so many codes of morality flourished, so many struggles of civilisation took place? Therefore we alone are the people of action; therefore do not tell us to labour any further. If you disbelieve this, then do one thing—take your sharp historical spade and dig up the layers of oblivion accumulated over the ages upon the soil of India, and see for yourselves where, in the very foundations of human civilisation, our handprint lies. Meanwhile, we shall just take another little nap.

In this fashion, some among us, half-conscious, inert, stupid, and haughty, with eyes barely open and heavy with sleep, express in a vague, irritable, indolent growl their contempt for the broad daylight of the world; and some, with a deep sense of self-reproach, try again and again to rouse their slack-nerved, torpid energy with fierce blows. And those who live in a waking dream, who waver unsteadily between action and thought, who can see the decay of the old and yet feel the incompleteness of the new—these unfortunate souls shake their heads again and again and say: O you new men, this new venture you have begun—it has not even reached its end yet, its whole balance of truth and falsehood is not even settled yet, not a single one of the eternal problems of human destiny has yet been resolved.

You have learned much, gained much—but have you found happiness? We who sit and call this whole universe illusion, and you who wear yourselves out treating it as absolute truth—are you any happier than we? By constantly discovering new wants, you make the poor man's poverty ever greater; you drag men out of the healthful shelter of the home into the fevered excitement of ceaseless toil; you have made work the master of the whole of life and enthroned frenzy in the seat of rest—do you know clearly where your progress is taking you?

We know perfectly well where we have arrived. Within our homes, bound to one another by modest wants and warm affection, we go on performing our small daily duties toward those nearest us. Whatever little happiness and prosperity we possess, we share it out among rich and poor, distant and near kin, guest and dependent and beggar alike. As far as possible, people pass their lives in whatever happiness is possible for them; no one wishes to abandon another, and no one is compelled by the storms of life to abandon anyone else.

India did not seek happiness; she sought contentment, and she has attained it, and has established it everywhere, in every respect. Now there is nothing further for her to do. Rather, sitting in her chamber of rest, she may watch your frenzied eruption of life and feel within herself a doubt as to the ultimate success of your civilisation. She may wonder whether you, when in the course of time you too must one day cease your labours, will be able to descend into so gentle, so tranquil, so restful an end. Will you be able to attain a conclusion as tender, as warm-hearted, as ours? Just as purpose is gradually consumed within its goal, just as the heated day, grown full of beauty, sinks into the darkness of evening—will you be able to attain so sweet a close? Or will it be, rather, that as a machine suddenly breaks down, as an engine, gathering ever more steam and heat, at last violently explodes, as two trains rushing toward each other on a single track are suddenly wrecked in mutual collision—will you, with all your headlong speed, meet some dreadful and violent end?

Be that as it may—you are now sailing upon an unknown sea in search of undiscovered shores; therefore go your way; we shall stay in our home—that, surely, is best.

But does mankind let one stay? When you wish to rest, the greater part of the world is, at that very moment, unresting. When the householder lies deep in sleep, the homeless wanderers are, at that very hour, roaming the roads in every direction.

Besides, this must be remembered: wherever in the world you come to a halt, from that very spot your decay will begin. For you alone will have stopped; no one else will stop with you. If you cannot keep pace with the current of the world, then the full, moving force of that current will come and strike against you, and you will either be utterly shattered and destroyed, or worn away little by little until you are swallowed beneath the tide of time. Either move on ceaselessly and strive after life, or rest and be extinguished—such is the law of the world.

Therefore, if we now lie nearly lost within the world, there is nothing for anyone to say about it. Yet when I lament over it, I do so in this sense: that though the law just mentioned generally holds true, we had somehow found for ourselves a certain exemption from it, so that for a long time it did not hold true in our case. It is commonly said that old age and death are the law of the world; yet our yogis discovered a way of remaining alive though as if dead, by suspending the very force of life. In the state of trance, they knew neither growth nor decay. It is the arrest of life's movement that ordinarily brings death; but by arresting the very movement of life itself, they attained a kind of eternal life.

Much the same may be said of our people as a nation. Whatever it is that causes other nations to perish, our people took that very cause and turned it into a means of discovering the path to long life. A nation perishes when the fervour of ambition subsides and when weary effort grows slack. We, with great pains, weakened our desires and thickened our efforts into torpor, and thereby undertook to preserve our longevity by keeping ourselves in a state of even balance.

It seems that this yielded some fruit. Where the hand of a clock naturally comes to rest, there, by artifice, time too was made to halt. Life was banished, to a considerable degree, from the earth, and lifted up into a sort of middle sky, where the dust of the world could hardly reach it; there it remained forever untouched, undisturbed, and secure.

But there is a story current that, not long ago, a certain long-lived yogi, deep in meditative trance, was brought from some forest in the vicinity to Calcutta. Here,

subjected to much disturbance, his trance was broken, and he died. Just so has our national yogic sleep, too, been shattered by outsiders through much disturbance. There is now no other difference between us and other nations, except this: that from long years of idle inaction, we have grown unaccustomed to the effort of living. We have fallen, from trance, straight into confusion.

But what is to be done? For the present, we must try to protect ourselves according to the ordinary rule, in the manner generally practised. We must cut our long matted locks and nails, bathe and eat with regularity, dress ourselves with some propriety, and set our hands and feet to work.

But of late the state of things has come to this: that though we have cut our locks and nails, and though we have begun to enter into worldly affairs and mix with the people of the world, we have not been able to change the attitude of our minds. We still say: our forefathers, living on nothing but myrobalan fruit, attained greatness though naked—why then should we set such store by fine clothes, food, and manners? So saying, we spread wide the fold of our dhoti, tuck it up behind, and sit at the doorway, casting an idle, indifferent glance toward the field of work, while we take the air.

We forget that what, in the practice of yoga, is a matter of the highest honour, is, in society, mere barbarism. As the body without the breath of life is unclean, so too is outward ritual without inward spirit.

People like you and me, who neither perform austerities nor live on sacrificial offerings, who put on shoes and socks, ride the tram chewing betel-leaf, and go regularly to office or school; whose lives, examined from beginning to end, offer not the slightest resemblance to those of a second Yajnavalkya, Vashishtha, Gautama, Jaratkaru, Vaishampayana, or the divine Krishna Dvaipayana—we students, whom no one has ever yet mistaken for infant ascetics of legend, who, having bathed thrice and swallowed a single myrobalan on some one day, thereafter find it absolutely necessary to miss office or college for several days running—for such as us to make such a pompous show of celibate austerity, to turn up our noses in scorn at the greater part of the world's industrious peoples, is not merely strange, incongruous, and laughable, but positively harmful.

There is a special provision for special work. The wrestler wears his loin-cloth, smears himself with mud, and struts about puffing out his chest, and passersby cheer him on—his son, no doubt, is a wretched, pitiable weakling; but if some apprentice clerk in the Bengal Secretariat office, who has passed his entrance examination and served there some five years, should likewise don a loin-cloth, smear himself with dust, and stagger about unsteadily, and, when a gentleman asks the reason, reply, "My father is a wrestler"—then, however much amusement this may afford to others, his relatives and friends can hardly help feeling especially anxious on his account. Therefore, either practise real austerity, or else abandon the pretence of it.

In ancient times, Brahmins formed a distinct order, entrusted with a particular function. In order to become properly suited to that function, they drew certain boundary-lines of conduct and observance around themselves on every side. With the utmost vigilance they never let their minds stray beyond those bounds. Every occupation has such a fitting boundary, which for any other occupation would be nothing but an obstacle. A solicitor, attempting to conduct his own business inside a confectioner's shop, could hardly avoid being hindered by a thousand difficulties; and if a retired solicitor should, for some particular reason, need to open a confectioner's shop, would it do for him to remain fondly attached to his desk, his files and papers, and his neatly filed law-reports arranged in tiers?

In the present age, that special character of the Brahmin no longer exists. Brahmins are no longer occupied solely with study, teaching, and the discussion of scripture. Most of them are employed in service of one kind or another; I see none of them practising austerities. No difference of function can any longer be observed between Brahmins and non-Brahmins; in such circumstances I can see no advantage or usefulness whatsoever in remaining confined within the narrow circle of Brahminhood.

But of late matters have come to such a pass that it is not only the Brahmin whom Brahminical law has bound. Even the Shudras, for whom the bonds of scripture were never at any time firmly binding, have on some occasion or other entered into that same enclosure aforementioned, and now sit there refusing, on any account, to budge from the spot.

In former times, since the Brahmins took upon themselves only the charge of knowledge and religion, various small tasks of society naturally fell to the Shudra; consequently, a thousand bonds of custom, rule, and ritual formula were withdrawn from over the Brahmins, and their freedom of movement was left largely unimpaired. Now, within one vast web of red tape spun across the whole of India, Brahmin and Shudra alike lie bound hand and foot, motionless as the dead. Neither are they doing the world's work, nor are they engaged in spiritual endeavour. Whatever tasks formerly existed have ceased; and whatever new tasks have now become necessary are being obstructed at every step.

It should therefore be understood that, now that we have suddenly been thrust into this world of active life, if we wish to preserve both life and honour here, it will not do to go about, fussing endlessly over trivial rules of conduct, lifting the hem of our garment in disgust, wrinkling the tip of our nose, treading with excessive caution—as though this vast universe were a mud-puddle, a muddy lane in the month of Shravan, unfit for the lotus-feet of the pure. If we wish now to establish ourselves, we require breadth and generosity of mind, a wholesome and thoroughly sound constitution, strength of body and intellect, breadth of knowledge, and tireless energy.

Carefully avoiding all contact with the common earth, calling ourselves, in our own high estimation, ever pure and undefiled, and looking with contempt upon everything else as base—this manner in which we have been proceeding is what I call spiritual dandyism. Through such excessive self-indulgence, manhood gradually becomes unproductive and barren.

Even lifeless matter, when kept sealed behind glass, may be preserved. And if a living creature, in order to keep it perfectly clean, be shut up within a transparent crystal case, dust may indeed be kept out, but along with it health, too, is shut out; both impurity and life alike are reduced, so far as possible, to nothing.

Our learned men are fond of saying that we have attained a wondrous Aryan purity, the fruit of long and arduous discipline, well worth preserving with the utmost care; and it is for this very reason, they say, that we strive to shun entirely all contact with barbarian foreigners.

Two things must be said in this regard. First, it is not the case that all of us actually practise this purity in any special sense; and yet, on the strength of considering the greater part of mankind impure, an entirely unjust judgment, a baseless arrogance, and needless barriers between man and man are created. Many will deny that this racial hatred of man, cloaked under the pretext of purity, works within our character like a corroding worm. With an innocent face they will say, "Why, do we hate anyone at all? Does not our own scripture say: *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*—the whole earth is one family?" But it is not what the scripture says, nor how the learned may interpret it, that is in question here; rather it must be considered whether, from what such conduct actually reveals—whatever its original cause may be—hatred of one's fellow man does not naturally arise in the minds of ordinary people; and whether the ordinary members of any one nation have the right to despise, indiscriminately, all the peoples of every other nation.

The second point is this: it is only material substance that is ever truly sullied by outward impurity. When one walks about wearing a fine new garment, one must move with the utmost caution—lest dust settle on it, lest water splash it, lest any sort of stain mark it; one must be very careful even where one sits down. If purity itself is treated merely as a garment, then one must live in constant fear lest a mere touch turn it black, lest a mere breath of air leave its mark upon it. What a grievous misfortune it is to live in the world burdened with so fastidious a purity! Since it becomes exceedingly difficult to maintain such an over-scrupulous purity amid the battlefield of society, the marketplace of labour, and the stage of public life, the unfortunate creature afflicted with this mania for cleanliness narrows his own field of movement more and more, keeps himself always shut up like a folded garment in a chest, and can never, by such means, achieve the full flowering of his manhood.

Under the influence of the soul's inward purity, one must learn to disregard, to some degree, outward defilement. The person excessively concerned with his own beauty, fearing discoloration, shrinks always from the dust, rain, and wind of the world, and remains, like a doll of butter, safely enshrined indoors. He forgets that fineness of complexion is but one external element of beauty, whereas health is one of its chief inward foundations—for an inanimate object, of course, this health is unnecessary, and so no harm is done in keeping it shut away. But if we do not regard the soul as something dead, then, even at some risk of impurity, it becomes necessary, for the sake of its health, for the sake of the strength it must acquire, to bring it into contact with the general world.

Here it will be understood why I used the phrase "spiritual dandyism." Excessive love of physical comfort is called luxury; in just the same way, excessive love of physical purity may be called spiritual luxury. That delicate purity which is shattered the moment there is some slight deviation in eating, sleeping, or sitting, is itself a form of dandyism. And every form of dandyism saps the strength and vigour of manhood.

It cannot be denied that narrowness and lifelessness are, to a considerable degree, safe. It is true that a society in which human nature finds its full expression, and in which the current of life runs strong, must endure much disturbance. Where there is more life, there is more freedom, and there more variety as well. There, both good and evil are equally powerful. If a man's claws and teeth are drawn, his food reduced, and he is kept twice daily in fear of the whip, then there arises a race of utterly gentle, domesticated creatures devoid of all vital energy; the whole variety of living nature is thereby wholly extinguished. Seeing this, one might well suppose that God had constructed this earth as a vast cage, and not as the dwelling-place of living beings.

But the ancient nursemaids of society believe that a healthy child is unruly, and that an unruly child sometimes cries, sometimes runs about, sometimes wishes to go outside—causing great commotion—and that therefore, if a little opium be given to keep him half-dead, then the housework, at least, may proceed without anxiety.

The more a society advances, the more, naturally, do its responsibilities and the complexity of its duties increase. If we say, we are not equal to so much, we lack the energy, the strength for it—if our parents say, we are unable to give our sons and daughters proper training in manhood until the appropriate age, but as early as is humanly possible (indeed, even earlier than is humanly possible) we are ready to become grandparents—if our students say, self-restraint is beyond our power, we are utterly incapable of waiting for the full maturing of body and mind, premature and impure marriage is essential for us, and the same holds for premature widowhood too—we want neither progress nor its disturbances—we shall do quite well as we are—then indeed there is nothing further to say. But this much at least must be said: it is well enough to recognise degradation as degradation, but if, through clever argument, we prove lifelessness to be virtue and

incapacity to be the highest excellence, then the path of true progress is blocked entirely, once and for all.

If we had reverence and faith in the fullness of manhood in all its aspects, none of this would need to be said at all. In that case we would feel no inclination to deceive ourselves with ingenious explanations and shut ourselves up within a handful of narrow, external superstitions.

When we were a nation in the true sense of the word, we had war, commerce, and industry; we travelled to distant lands and welcomed foreigners to our own; we exchanged varied learning with peoples of other races; we possessed the strength of world-conquerors and manifold splendour and glory. Today, across the frontier of time, separated by many years and many differences, we look back upon that Indian civilisation as though upon some distant, sanctified, incense-veiled, unearthly realm of penance, and feel a certain kinship between it and our present shadowy, workless, drowsy, silent village existence—but that resemblance is never a true one.

The notion we entertain—that we possessed only a spiritual civilisation, that our fasting, emaciated forefathers each sat apart in solitude, whetting only their own individual souls, striving to refine themselves into some thin, translucent, almost incorporeal line of light utterly beyond the reach of action—is nothing but pure fancy.

That all-embracing ancient civilisation of ours died and turned to dust long, long ago; our present society is but its ghost. Relying merely upon a resemblance of outward form, we imagine that our ancient civilisation, too, had not the slightest trace of blood and flesh in it, that it possessed only a kind of shadowy spirituality—as though it had none of the substance of earth or fire within it, but consisted merely of a little wind and empty sky.

One has only to read the Mahabharata to see how powerful was the passion of life within that ancient civilisation of ours. Within it we see so much change, so much social upheaval, so much clash of opposing forces. That society was not the smoothly finished, self-consistent creation of some supremely wise and skilful artificer's own hand. In that society, on the one hand, greed, hatred, fear, envy, and unrestrained pride; on the other, humility, heroism, self-sacrifice, generous

magnanimity, and rare virtue, kept human character ever churning, ever awake. In that society, not every man was virtuous, not every woman chaste, not every Brahmin devoted to austerity. In that society Vishvamitra was a Kshatriya, while Drona, Kripa, and Parashurama were Brahmins; Kunti was chaste, while the forgiving Yudhishthira was a Kshatriya prince, and Draupadi, that woman of unwavering truth, thirsted for the blood of her enemies. That society was marked by the play of life in light and shadow, in good and evil; human society then was not like some finished, ordered, symmetrical piece of craftsmanship. And it was precisely through the clash of such tumultuous, varied human passions that our ancient civilisation, vast as the towering Sal tree and mighty as the great banyan, stood ever wakeful, holding its head high, in the midst of a society perpetually alive with energy.

That powerful, forceful civilisation we today imagine, quite falsely, as something utterly meek, unresisting, indifferent, safe, and lifeless, and say: We are that same civilised race, we are that same spiritual Aryan people; we shall do nothing but mutter prayers and quarrel among ourselves; by forbidding sea-voyages, and by treating other races as untouchable, we shall fulfil the true worth of that great and ancient name of Hindu.

But rather than this, if I love truth, if I act according to my convictions, if instead of raising the children of the household amid a heap of pampering falsehoods like so many spoiled, clinging dependents, I can raise them straightforward, vigorous, and firm in the teaching of truth, holding their heads high; if I can cultivate in my mind such an unassuming breadth of spirit that I may joyfully and courteously welcome, from every quarter, whatever knowledge and greatness there is to be found; if, through the study of music, art, literature, history, science, and other manifold branches of learning—through travel at home and abroad—through minute observation of everything in the world, and through calm, impartial reflection, I can open and unfold myself freely on every side—then I cannot say whether what I now call "Hinduness" will survive entirely intact or not, but I shall be able to achieve, to a considerable degree, a true kinship with that vital, striving, truth-seeking Hindu civilisation of ancient times.

Here a comparison occurs to me. In the present age, India's ancient civilisation is like the hard coal lying deep within a mine. Once, when the law of growth and decay, of give and take, prevailed within it, it lived as a vast, luxuriant forest. Then

it held within it the living meeting of spring and monsoon, the natural unfolding of fruit, flower, and foliage. Now it has neither growth nor motion—but this does not mean it has become useless. Within it, the heat and light of many ages lie stored in latent form. But to us it is dark and cold. From it we merely construct, for our amusement, pillars of dense black ornamentation. For if there be no living flame in one's own hearth, then no matter how much ancient mineral ore one digs up from the depths of the past through mere scholarly research, it remains utterly unproductive. Nor, indeed, do we even gather it ourselves—we buy it from the Englishman's coal-depot at Ranigunj. There is no shame in that; but what are we doing with it? There is no fire—we merely blow upon it, fan it with paper, while some among us smear vermilion upon its forehead and sit devoutly before it, ringing bells.

Only if living manhood exists within ourselves can we bring the ancient and the modern, the manhood of East and West alike, into our own use.

The dead man belongs wholly and entirely to the place where he lies. The living man stands at the centre of all ten directions. He builds unity out of diversity and bridges between opposites; he extends his claim over every truth; he does not bow down in one direction alone, but counts as his true progress the unfolding of himself, freely, on every side.

1298 (Bengali calendar)

# THE DIFFERENCE OF SOCIETIES

In the *Contemporary Review* of last January, Dr. Dillon wrote an essay entitled "The Tiger, China, and the Lamb, Europe." In it he described the unspeakable atrocities committed by Europe against the people of China on the pretext of war. Beside the wild barbarity of civilised Europe, the notorious and terrible deeds of history's most infamous enemies of mankind—Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, and the like—seem to bow their heads in shame.

Europe takes pride in its own compassion and righteousness, and forever holds Asia up to scorn. We take no pleasure in finding occasion to answer this charge. For the fabrication of slander can do no real harm to the weak at the hands of the strong; but the slander which the strong proclaims against the weak becomes, on some occasions, a matter of grave consequence for the weak indeed.

Cruelty, barbarity, and intransigence are commonly spoken of, as a kind of proverbial saying, as characteristic of the "Asiatic temperament" in European society. For this reason, it has become an increasingly common refrain in Christian society these days that it is not fitting to judge Asia by the standards of Europe.

When we first received the education of Europe, we took from it above all this one refrain: "there is no essential difference between man and man." For this reason we were preparing ourselves in such a way that all distinction between ourselves and our new teacher might be erased. And then, all at once, the schoolmaster closed his book of scripture and declared: between East and West there exists such a difference as can never be transgressed.

Very well then—let there be difference; let difference remain. It is variety itself that preserves the health of the world. It is because heat and cold are not the same everywhere upon this earth that the winds are able to blow at all. Let the differing ideals of civilisation, each fulfilled in its own distinct form, preserve their separate character; for only then can that very separateness give rise to a genuine exchange of learning between them.

But what do we see happening now? An exchange, merely, of abuse for abuse, of cannon-shot for cannon-shot. Thus has the new Christian century begun.

If, having admitted that difference exists, one lacks the capacity to enter into its inward substance with understanding, with affection, with warm-hearted humility—then what, in nineteen hundred years, has Christian teaching accomplished? Shall the walls of the Eastern fortress be battered down and levelled by cannon-fire, or shall its great gate be opened with a key, and entry made from within?

The present upheaval in China had its origin in the attacks made by the Chinese people upon the missionaries. Europe may easily persuade itself that it is only the intolerance and illiberality of China that stands revealed as barbarity, in opposition to the propagation of religion and the spread of learning. The missionary, after all, does not go to China to conquer her kingdom.

Here indeed lies the difference between East and West—and it is a difference that Europe makes no effort to understand with reverence, with patience; for Europe has the strength of arm to do otherwise.

The kingdom of China belongs to the king of China. If someone attacks that kingdom, then it is a war between king and king, and whatever harm befalls the subjects thereby is no very grave matter. But the dominion of Europe does not belong to its king—it belongs to the whole realm. The nation-state is the very body of European civilisation; unless this body is protected from every blow, its life cannot survive. Consequently they cannot even conceive the gravity of any other kind of injury. If Vivekananda preaches Vedanta in England, or if Dharmapala establishes an English Buddhist community there, it does not touch Europe at all, for the body of Europe is the state. The whole of England will give its life to defend the rock of Gibraltar, but it does not feel any such necessity to be vigilant concerning the Christian religion.

In the East, it is the reverse. The body of Eastern civilisation is Dharma. By Dharma is meant not "religion" in the narrow sense, but the whole web of social duty and obligation—within which religion and politics both find their appropriate place. Strike at this, and the whole country is thrown into anguish; for it is in society itself that its vital core resides, and its life-force has no other refuge.

The loose-woven power of the state cannot make itself forcefully felt in every corner of vast China. The emperor's command may reach the far-flung provinces

from the capital, but his imperial might does not; and yet even there, peace exists, order exists, civilisation exists. Dr. Dillon expressed astonishment at this. It is no simple matter to keep so vast a kingdom in order while expending so little force.

But it is not by military rule that this immense land of China has been held in order—it is Dharma that governs it, unfailingly. Father and son, brother and sister, husband and wife, neighbour and villager, king and subject, priest and worshipper—all bound up together—this is what constitutes this Dharma. However great the upheaval outside, whoever ascends the throne, this Dharma, abiding deep within the vast body of China, has held this immense society in order by an unbroken law. When that Dharma is struck, China feels the agony of death, and grows ruthless in self-defence. Who then can hold her back? At such a time, what matters the king, what matters the king's army? Then it is not the Chinese empire, but the Chinese people, that awakens.

A small illustration will make my meaning clear. The English family is bound up with the lifetime of the particular individual. Our family is a branch of the lineage. In this one small difference, everything else comes to differ entirely. Unless the Englishman can enter into the heart of this distinction, he will never be able to understand, even a little, the deep affections of a Hindu family, and on many points he will grow intolerant and contemptuous. In a Hindu family, bound by lineage, the living, the dead, and the yet-unborn are all joined to one another. Therefore, if someone from within a Hindu family renounces the lineage and departs from it, what a grievous blow this deals to the family as a whole—the Englishman cannot comprehend this at all. For in the English family, no bond is firm except the bond of marriage. This is why, though widow remarriage has been made lawful in Hindu society, it has not become widely practised. For just as a living creature cannot cast off any living limb of its own body, so too a Hindu family is not prepared to cut itself off by abandoning its widow. Child marriage, too, the Hindu family holds preferable for this very reason. For though union between man and woman may properly occur only once the age suited to the flowering of love has been reached, the age at which one becomes wholly merged into the entire family is childhood itself.

The prohibition of widow remarriage and the practice of child marriage may, from another point of view, prove harmful; but one who truly understands the structure of Hindu society cannot simply dismiss this as barbarism. Just as the Englishman, in order to protect India, must, despite the great expense involved, defend Gibraltar,

Malta, Suez, and Aden, so too the Hindu, in order to preserve the firmness and integrity of the family, must observe these rules even at some cost to himself.

Whether it is good to construct family and society upon so rigid a foundation is a question the Englishman may well raise. Whether it is good to place political rigidity above all else, keeping the interests of the state paramount, is likewise a matter for debate. Day by day Europe is being burdened, in the building up of its military strength, by the ever-increasing sacrifice of every other need of the country; the excess of its military establishment is destroying its social harmony. Where will this end? In the eruption of nihilist bombs, or in the mutual, cataclysmic collision of nations? We are dying, bound hand and foot in a thousand chains, restraining self-interest and licence; if this indeed be true, then whether Europe, having opened wide the path of self-interest and freedom, will live forever thereby, remains yet to be tested.

Be that as it may, these differences between East and West are matters to be pondered and understood with care. When we come to judge the customs of Europe, unless we judge them in relation to the social system of Europe as a whole, an unjust contempt often arises even in our own minds. As proof of this: we cast a critical eye upon the English custom of keeping daughters unmarried until a relatively advanced age; since this practice is not customary among us, we express various apprehensions concerning it. And yet we never bring into our reckoning the fact that keeping a child-widow unmarried for her entire life is far more perilous than that. In the case of the unmarried maiden we say that human nature is weak; yet in the case of the widow we claim that nature can be mastered through the discipline of learning. But the truth of the matter is that none of these rules arose out of some established moral principle—they have come to stand simply under the pressure of necessity. Just as early marriage of maidens is necessary for the structure of Hindu society, so too is lifelong widowhood. It is for this very reason that widow remarriage does not occur despite the risks involved, and child marriage of maidens does occur despite its harms and inconveniences. It is by this same law of necessity that in Europe the marriage of maidens at a more advanced age, and the remarriage of widows, have come to be established. There, it is not feasible for an underage girl to set up an independent household; there, since a widow finds no refuge within any family, a second marriage often becomes, for her, an absolute necessity. This rule is fundamentally good insofar as it suits the

preservation of European social structure; whatever other good qualities it may possess besides this are incidental, beside the point.

Whatever comes to be established in a society out of necessity gradually becomes intertwined with an aesthetic sentiment. Anyone who reads European literature will readily perceive what an exalted place the beauty of free, youthful love between man and woman has come to occupy in the European mind. European poets have portrayed the ideal of that love in the most radiant and glowing terms.

In our country, it is the gentle, benevolent devotion of the faithful wife and homemaker that has taken hold of the Hindu heart with such sweetness. The beauty of that sentiment has attained, in our literature, a place higher than all other beauties. That is a discussion we shall take up elsewhere.

But it would betray our own blindness and folly were we, for that reason, to disregard the beauty of free love that illuminates the whole of European society. In truth, it touches our own hearts as well. Were this not so, English poetry and the English novel would be, for us, nothing but falsehood. Beauty does not observe distinctions of race between Hindu and Englishman. When literature brings to vivid expression the ideal beauty inherent in English society, it overwhelms our own national prejudices and shines forth radiant within our hearts. In just the same way, if the Englishman cannot perceive the beneficent beauty that resides within our Hindu ideal of family life, then in that respect the Englishman himself is the barbarian.

European society has produced many great and noble souls; there, literature, art, and science continue to advance day by day; this society, at every step, proves its own grandeur by its own achievement, and advances thereby. I cannot even imagine anyone daring to step out from before its chariot to obstruct it, once its own steed has begun to run wild. Those common writers of Bengal who, without regarding so magnificent a society with due reverence, mock it, unknowingly hold up their own selves to ridicule.

On the other hand, that society which the ceaseless upheavals of many hundred years have not been able to raze to the ground; which, though enduring a thousand misfortunes, has kept India bound within the discipline of compassion and righteous duty, never letting her sink into utter ruin; which has preserved the

intellectual faculties of the Hindu race with such careful vigilance that, given fuel from without, they can still be kindled into flame; which has compelled even the ignorant and unlettered masses, at every step, to restrain their impulses and dedicate themselves to the good of family and society—that society, too, deserves reverence; and any missionary who fails to regard it with reverence is himself unworthy of reverence. He needs to understand this much at least: that this vast society is like some great living organism; before striking any one of its limbs, however necessary that blow may be, it is essential first to consider the constitution of the whole body.

In truth, there is diversity among civilisations; that very variety is the intention of Providence. Only when, amid this diversity, they can enter into one another bearing luminous knowledge and warmth of heart, is the true purpose of that diversity fulfilled. Whatever education and habit closes the door against such entry is but a step toward barbarism. It is this very thing that goes on breeding injustice, prejudice, and cruelty. What, then, is the true mark of civilisation? That civilisation which has attained it is *sarvajñaḥ sarvam eva-ābiveśa*—"all-knowing, entering into all"; it knows all, and enters into all. That which forever mocks and reviles Western civilisation is mere "Hindu-ism," not Hindu civilisation. In the same way, that which utterly denies Eastern civilisation is mere "sahib-ishness," not European civilisation. Any ideal that is hostile toward another ideal is, in truth, no ideal at all.

Of late, this blind hostility has come to defile the very peace of civilisation in Europe. When Ravana, blinded by self-interest, turned to unrighteousness, Lakshmi forsook him. It seems as though Lakshmi has likewise departed from the temple of modern Europe. That is why the Boxer villages are set aflame, why China has cast off all shame of her savagery, and why Dharma itself is being tormented by the cruel pronouncements of the very preachers of religion.

1308 (Bengali calendar)

---

# AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE MORAL SENSE

I have said elsewhere that a certain English professor, discussing the matter of jury trial in this country, remarked that it is wrong to grant the right of jury trial to a people who, being only half-civilised, do not understand the *Sanctity of Life*.

Let us grant, for argument's sake, that the Englishman understands the sanctity of life better than we do. It would follow, then, that when such an Englishman takes a life, the gravity of his offence is greater than ours. And yet we observe that no Englishman who has murdered a native has ever been hanged upon the verdict of an English judge and an English jury. Perhaps the Englishman's very sensitivity to the sanctity of life provides the accused with some evidence in his favour—but that evidence, to the native mind, seems somehow incomplete.

Such reasoning wounds us on two counts. The life that is lost is lost, in any case; but along with it, our honour, too, is destroyed. The contempt for our race that such judgments reveal wounds every one of us alike.

There is a newspaper in England called the *Globe*—the very paper of the respectable classes there. It once wrote: Tommy Atkins (that is, the common soldier) does not strike a native intending to kill him, but the natives, once struck, tend to die anyway; and so, whenever Tommy receives a light sentence for this, the native rags set up their usual outcry.

I see a great deal of sympathy expressed here for Tommy Atkins—but where, may I ask, is the "sanctity of life"? Does even the smallest fraction of the force of that brutal blow, under which our skulls are shattered, register even faintly within the columns of this respectable newspaper? Those who look upon a legally sanctioned murder with such tender indulgence, and greet with weary contempt the lamentations of the murdered man's kin—are they not themselves nurturing murder in their hearts?

For some time now we have observed that, in European civilisation, the ideal of moral conduct rests generally upon habit rather than upon any inward moral sense. This sense of Dharma has never been made radiant from within the depths of that

civilisation's heart. For this reason, outside the boundaries of habit, this ideal finds no path for itself, and often goes astray.

In European society, murder and assault cannot occur from house to house—such conduct runs contrary to the ordinary interests of that society. Killing by poison or by the sword has, over the course of several centuries, gradually become foreign to European habit.

But murder can occur without weapon, without bloodshed. If the moral sense were truly genuine and inward, then such murder too would be condemned, and rendered impossible.

Let me illustrate this with a particular example.

Henry Savage Landor is a well-known traveller. He conceived an irresistible desire to visit Lhasa, the sacred pilgrimage site of Tibet. Everyone knows that the Tibetans regard European travellers and missionaries with suspicion. Their impassable roads remain unknown to the foreigner—this being their chief means of self-protection; and if they are unwilling to hand over that weapon into the keeping of the Geographical Society and rest content, they cannot be blamed for it.

But that others should be bound by such prohibitions, while he himself is bound by none—this is the very creed of Europe. Whether or not there is any real necessity for it, the mere transgression of danger for the sake of glory earns such applause in Europe that, for many, it becomes an irresistible temptation. Europe's daring men roam foreign lands seeking out peril wherever they may find it. By whatever means necessary, whichever European first sets foot in Lhasa will find his fame and prestige in society without limit.

And so, evading the prohibitions of the snowy mountains and of the Tibetans, one must find a way to Lhasa. Mr. Landor set out on his journey from Almora in Kumaon. A Hindu servant joined him along the way, by the name of Chandan Singh.

On the borders of Kumaon, adjoining Tibet, within British territory, there dwells a hill people called the Shoka. They live in constant terror of Tibetan oppression and harassment. Landor has repeatedly complained that British rule is unable to protect them from Tibetan persecution. It was from among these very Shoka people that

the Sahib had to gather his coolies and porters. With great difficulty, thirty men were found.

From that point onward, throughout the journey, the Sahib's chief anxiety and effort was directed toward preventing the coolies from fleeing. They had ample reason to wish to flee. Landor writes, in the twenty-fifth chapter of his travel account:

"As this band of porters, silent and grave, bearing their loads upon their backs, climbed higher and higher with pitiful, laboured breath, the fear arose in my mind how many of them, if any, would ever be able to return."

We may well ask: when such apprehension already existed in your own mind, what name should be given to the act of driving these unwilling, unfortunate men into the very jaws of death? You stand to gain glory, and along with it, considerable prospect of material gain besides. You may risk your very life in pursuit of that hope—but what temptation lay before them?

Much controversy has arisen in Europe over vivisection, undertaken in the name of scientific progress. Even the propriety of administering anaesthetics while experimenting upon living creatures has been debated at length. Yet when, for the sake of earning applause and glory, prolonged and unbearable torment is inflicted upon unwilling human beings, and an account of it is published in the pages of a travel narrative, the critics applaud, edition after edition sells out entirely, and thousands of readers, both men and women, peruse such accounts with astonishment and discuss them with pleasure. What, in the end, becomes of the innocent Shoka porters who endured such unbearable suffering, day and night, upon that impassable snowbound path? Suppose Mr. Landor did indeed reach Lhasa—what benefit could possibly accrue to the world from this that could justify, even in the smallest measure, driving these frightened, suffering, desperately fleeing men relentlessly toward death? And yet—how strange—the writer feels no hesitation over this, nor the reader any compassion!

Landor well knew how cruelly the Tibetans could torment and kill, and for that very reason how greatly the Shoka feared them, and how utterly powerless British rule was to protect them from Tibetan hands. He also knew that the zeal, excitement, and temptation that drove him held not the slightest counterpart in the hearts of

the Shoka. And yet, in the very language and manner in which Landor, on page 165 of his book, describes the fear and misery of his porters, I offer the following translation:

"Each of them covered his face with his hands and wept bitterly. Tears streamed down both of Kachi's cheeks; Dola sobbed uncontrollably; and Dukpa, along with another Tibetan who had been engaged in my service—men who, out of fear, had adopted disguises—sat hidden behind their loads. Although our own situation was perilous enough, I could not help laughing at the sight of my men in such a pitiable, panic-stricken state."

Afterward, when these unfortunate men attempted to flee, Landor calmed them by declaring that whoever attempted to escape or to rebel would be shot dead.

Elsewhere too we find evidence of how trivial an excuse could rouse in Mr. Landor the impulse to shoot. When Landor first received a formal prohibition from the Tibetan authorities, he pretended to be turning back. Descending into a valley, he trained his field-glass and observed, upon a mountain ridge above, nearly thirty heads peering out from behind the rocks. The Sahib writes:

"I felt greatly annoyed. If they wished, why should they not follow us openly? What need was there to keep watch from a distance? And so I took up my four-hundred-yard rifle, lay flat upon the ground, and fixed my aim upon the head that was most clearly visible among the rest."

There is a fine irony in that "and so." How Mr. Landor despises concealment! He himself, along with another missionary companion of his, had represented themselves as Hindu pilgrims—openly pretending to be returning to India while secretly making their way toward Lhasa—and yet the concealment practised by others was so intolerable to him that, flattening himself upon the earth to hide his own presence, he immediately raised his four-hundred-yard rifle and declared: "I only wish to teach these cowards a lesson." What manly courage the Sahib displayed, hidden at a distance, taking aim with his rifle—there was no one there to judge him for it! We have heard much of the many weaknesses of we "Orientals," but this habit of becoming a thief oneself and then judging others with sly suspicion is not, at least, characteristic of us as it is of Westerners. The truth of the matter is that where might exists, the seat of judgment can be monopolised entirely by the

strong. Then the habit of despising others becomes deeply ingrained, and no occasion ever arises for one to sit in judgment upon oneself.

It is well known how cruelly travellers in Asia and Africa treat their unwilling native porters, and by what deceit, force, and cunning they drive them, in the excitement of exploration and discovery, straight into the jaws of danger and death. And yet, despite the supposedly acute sensitivity of these Western civilised peoples on the matter of the Sanctity of Life, one hears no objection raised anywhere. The reason is this: the moral sense is not something inward to Western civilisation; it has emerged outwardly, by the natural law of self-interest. This is why it becomes distorted the moment one steps outside the boundary of Europe. Indeed, even within that very boundary, wherever self-interest grows strong, Europe has begun to despise as mere weakness any attempt to preserve compassion and righteousness! In time of war, to set fire to the entire territory of the opposing side, and to speak against taking their orphaned children and women captive, is dismissed as mere "sentimentality." In Europe, dishonesty is generally condemned—yet in politics, one party is forever accusing the other of falsehood. Even Gladstone did not escape this accusation. For this very reason, in the war against China, the excesses of European soldiery crossed even the limits of barbarity, and self-interest-maddened Belgium's conduct in the Congo region descended into sheer diabolism.

How the Negroes are treated in South America has been reported in the English *Daily News* of the 2nd of July last, drawing upon the *Post* newspaper published in New York. On the pretext of trivial offences, Negro men and women are brought before the police court; there the magistrate fines them, whereupon white men present in the courtroom pay off the fine, and in exchange for this small sum, they bind these very Negroes into slavery. Thereafter, by whip and iron chain and every other means, they are prevented from disobedience and from flight. One Negro woman was actually beaten to death with a whip. Another Negro woman was arrested on a charge of bigamy. While she was held in custody, a barrister agreed to take up her case. But since no trial was ever held, this woman was released as innocent. The barrister, demanding his fee, and in lieu of the money owed him, sent this Negro woman to work for fourteen months at MacRickie's camp. There she was kept locked up under key for nine months; she was forcibly married to another man and told that she would never again be united with her lawful husband. Fearing she might flee, dogs were set loose behind her; her master, McRickie, beat

her with his own hand with a whip, and made her swear under oath that, if released, she would declare that she had been receiving wages of five dollars a month.

The *Daily News* remarks that, given the massacre of Jews in Russia, the atrocities of Belgium in the Congo, and the like, it has become exceedingly difficult to cast blame upon one's neighbours.

*"After all, no great power is entirely innocent of the charge of treating with barbarous harshness the alien races which are subject to its rule."*

In our country, the ideal of Dharma is a possession of the inner heart; it is not something to be confined within an outward boundary. If we once accept the Sanctity of Life, then we set no limit to it anywhere—not even among beasts, birds, insects, or reptiles. India was once a flesh-eating land; today, meat is forbidden to her. That a flesh-eating people should deprive itself and abandon the eating of meat altogether has, I think, no second example anywhere in the world. In India, we find that even the extremely poor do not hesitate to share whatever they earn among their distant kin. We have acknowledged that self-interest, too, possesses a rightful claim—but we have curtailed it, so far as possible, accepting every manner of inconvenience in doing so. In our country it is said that Dharma must be preserved even in the midst of war; the treatment our Kshatriyas were enjoined to give to the disarmed, the fleeing, and the enemy who has sought sanctuary was prescribed as sacred duty—conduct that Europe would regard as merely laughable. The sole reason for this is that we sought to make Dharma a treasure of the inner heart. The natural law of self-interest did not shape our Dharma; rather, the law of Dharma sought to restrain and govern our self-interest. And so, though we may have grown weak in worldly matters, though we may have suffered defeat at the hands of foreign enemies, yet the glory we have won in striving to make the ideal of Dharma triumph over self-interest and expediency shall never, in the end, prove to be in vain—one day, that day too shall come.

1310 (Bengali calendar)