

ESSAY

WORSHIP OF CHARACTER

Rabindranath Tagore



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THE LIFE OF VIDYASAGAR — I

Read on the 13th of Shraban, 1302, at the afternoon session of the annual meeting of the Vidyasagar Memorial Society, at the Emerald Theatre

The foremost quality in the character of Vidyasagar—the quality by which he cut through the pettiness of village custom, the inertia of Bengali life, cleaving through all obstacles by the sheer force of his own momentum, tearing asunder the breast of harsh adversity, and carried forward the current of his firm, resolute, singular, solitary life—not toward Hindu orthodoxy, not toward sectarianism, but toward that boundless, unbound humanity overflowing with the tears of compassion—if I should today refrain from praising him for that very quality, my duty would remain wholly unfulfilled. For when one studies the record of Vidyasagar's life, this thought arises again and again: that he was not merely a great Bengali gentleman, nor was he simply an orthodox Hindu—he was something far greater than either; he was, in the truest sense, a Man. In the biography of Vidyasagar, it is this rare abundance of humanity that constitutes the subject of his supreme glory. That mountain-like magnificence of character has, in fact, dwarfed even his own achievements.

His principal achievement is the Bengali language. If this language should ever come to be enriched with the treasures of literature, if it should come to be counted among the nurse-mothers of human civilization, if amid the world's sorrows and griefs it can create a new place of consolation, amid the triviality and narrow self-interest of worldly existence an ideal realm of nobility, amid the weariness and unwholesomeness of daily human life a secluded bower of beauty—then alone will this achievement of his attain the glory it deserves.

It is necessary here to indicate clearly how Vidyasagar's influence operated upon the development of the Bengali language.

Vidyasagar was the first true artist of the Bengali language. Before him, the beginnings of Bengali prose literature had already been made, but it was he who first introduced the perfection of art into Bengali prose. That language is not merely a vessel for thought, that one's duty is not fulfilled by somehow stuffing a quantity of statements into it by whatever means—this Vidyasagar proved by example. He showed that whatever matter is to be conveyed must be expressed simply, beautifully, and in orderly fashion. In today's world this may not seem so great a

task, but just as social bonds are essential for the development of humanity, so too, unless language is beautifully disciplined through the bonds of art, true literature can never arise from it. War is possible through a trained army, not through a mere mob—for a mob obstructs and impedes itself; it is difficult to direct it. Vidyasagar took the unruly rabble of Bengali prose and made it well-divided, well-arranged, well-groomed, and well-disciplined, granting it ease of movement and efficiency of action; now, by means of it, many a general may overcome the formidable obstacles of expressing thought and discover and conquer new territories of literature—but to him who composed and trained this army, the glory of victory in battle must first of all be given.

Freeing the Bengali language from the previously prevalent, unnecessary burden of compound-word ostentation, establishing a sound discipline of syntactic arrangement among its words, Vidyasagar was not content merely to make Bengali prose fit for every kind of use—he was ever striving to make it graceful as well. By establishing a harmony of sound among the words of his prose, by maintaining within its movement an unobtrusive rhythmic flow, by selecting gentle and simple words, Vidyasagar bestowed upon Bengali prose both beauty and fullness. Rescuing it from the hands of both rustic pedantry and rustic crudeness alike, he shaped it into a civilized tongue worthy of the refined assemblies of the world. Were one to examine the condition of Bengali prose before his time, one would find abundant evidence, in this very shaping of the language, of Vidyasagar's artistic genius and creative power.

But it is not merely for possessing genius that Vidyasagar deserves honor. Indeed, that upon which Vidyasagar exercised his genius was itself something flowing, ever-changing. Language is like the current of a river; no one's name can be carved upon it. It seems as though it has always, everywhere, flowed naturally in just this manner from time immemorial. In truth, to determine from which particular springs and streams it has been formed and nourished, one must journey upstream and climb the inaccessible mountain-peaks of ancient history. A particular book, or picture, or statue, forever preserves its own distinctiveness and reminds us always of its creator; but language, receiving life continuously from countless people both humble and great, spreads and expands until it forgets its earlier history, and does not proclaim, in any particular way, anyone's name.

But there is no need to lament this; for Vidyasagar's glory does not depend merely upon his genius.

Genius is not the whole of a man—it is but a portion of him. Genius is like lightning within the clouds; humanity, however, is the daylight of character, universal and constant. Genius is the most brilliant part of a man; but humanity manifests itself in every moment, in every action of life. Genius, like lightning, often strikes the observer's eye with fierce intensity precisely because of its very partiality; and greatness of character, by the very virtue of its all-pervading nature, appears fainter than genius by comparison. But that the excellence of character is the truest excellence—of this, upon reflection, no one can harbor any doubt.

There is no doubt that to express truth and beauty through stone or canvas is the work of skill; it requires overcoming manifold obstacles and applying extraordinary craftsmanship. But to express that truth and beauty through the whole of one's own life is a still more arduous task; at every step one must overcome harder obstacles, and it demands a still greater natural refinement of perception, skill, restraint, and strength.

This genius for the shaping of character obeys no sectarian scripture. Just as a true poet's poetic gift transcends the rules of rhetoric, and yet, mysteriously composed within the universal human heart, never naturally conflicts with any rule of an unwritten canon of aesthetics—so too, those who are truly human bear their scripture within their own hearts, and yet that scripture spontaneously harmonizes with all the eternal ordinances of universal humanity. Therefore, just as "originality"—that is, incomparable individuality—manifests itself in other forms of genius, so too does such incomparable individuality become necessary in the unfolding of a great character. Many suggest that Vidyasagar lacked original genius; they know that originality manifests itself only in literature and art, in science and philosophy. But that Vidyasagar, amid this unaccomplished, insignificant Bengali society, brought forth his own character in full bloom as an ideal of humanity—achieving thereby an extraordinary and singular originality—this is exceedingly rare in the history of Bengal. So rare, indeed, that within a single century only one or two other names come to mind, and among them Rammohan Roy stands foremost.

The moment one hears the word "originality," one might mistakenly suppose it to mean narrowness. One might think it a purely personal peculiarity, having no

connection with the general good; but that notion is not correct. In truth, we remain so entangled and enveloped in the chains of convention, in the bonds of complex artifice, that we become like puppets worked by the machinery of society; we perform most of our tasks blindly, under the sway of custom; we do not know what selfhood means, nor do we feel any need to know. The true person within us spends almost the whole of life, from birth to death, in a state of dormancy, while in his place works a mechanism bound by rule. Those in whom the measure of humanity is greater cannot have that powerful force suppressed beneath the lifeless covering of inherited custom and habit. It is these very persons who attain the right of self-governance within the kingdom of their own character. This freedom of the humanity dwelling within is what we call selfhood. This selfhood belongs, in its manifest form, to the particular individual, but in its hidden depths, it belongs to all humankind. Great persons, by virtue of this power of selfhood, are on the one hand distinct and solitary, and on the other, kin and brothers to the whole human race. In our country, we find evidence of this in the lives of both Rammohan Roy and Vidyasagar. On the one hand, just as they were thoroughly Indian, so too, on the other, we can see a considerable close resemblance between their character and the European temperament. And yet this was not a resemblance born of imitation. In dress, in conduct, in manner, they were completely Bengali; none equaled them in knowledge of their own native scriptures; they themselves laid the foundation of teaching their own people in their mother tongue—and yet, in fearless firmness, in devotion to truth, in benevolence toward mankind, in resolute determination and self-reliance, they were particularly comparable to the great men of Europe. Even in the contempt they expressed for the trivial outward imitation of Europeans, one finds evidence of that deep, European-like sense of self-respect. Not merely Europeans, but even the simple, truth-loving Santals—in whatever measure they were adorned with humanity, in that very measure did Vidyasagar feel a truer inward kinship with the Santal than with his own fellow Bengali.

Why, now and then, does such a strange exception occur in the order of Providence—why, where the Divine Architect was fashioning forty million Bengalis, does He suddenly sit down and mold one or two individual men—this is difficult to say. By what law the rise of a great man occurs is mysterious in every country—in our own land of feeble endeavor and timid hearts, that mystery is doubly impenetrable. The creation of Vidyasagar's character too is shrouded in mystery; but this much can be seen—that the mold from which that character was cast was

itself a good one. In the ancestors of Ishwarchandra, the raw materials of greatness had accumulated in abundant measure.

When one studies the account of Vidyasagar's life, the very first to draw our attention is his grandfather, Ramjay Tarkabhushan. There can be no doubt that the man was extraordinary.

His ancestral home was at Banamalipur in the district of Midnapore. After his father's death, a dispute arose with his brothers over the division of property, and he abandoned the household and departed. Long afterward, Tarkabhushan returned to find that his wife, Durgadevi, having suffered the neglect of her brothers-in-law, had first gone from her father-in-law's home to her own father's house in the village of Birsingha; and later, even there, tormented by the taunts of her brother and sister-in-law, had, with the help of her aged father, taken up residence in a hut not far from the ancestral home, and was spinning thread at the wheel to support, with great hardship, her two sons and four daughters. Hearing of his brothers' conduct, Tarkabhushan renounced his own claim and any relation with them, and remained in poverty in a different village. But when greatness dwells within a man's nature, poverty cannot make him poor. I wish to quote here, in places, Vidyasagar's own description of his grandfather's character:

"He was exceedingly high-spirited; in no respect could he bear to bow before anyone, or, in any manner, to tolerate disrespect or dishonor. In all places, on all matters, he acted according to his own judgment; to follow another's judgment was wholly contrary to his nature and his habits. Neither in expectation of favor, nor for any other reason, could he ever bring himself to court or flatter another."¹

From this, listeners may understand why even a joint family could not contain this fiery spirit. There were five brothers, but he alone flew off in his own trajectory, like a star separated from the nebular cluster. Even the heavily burdened machinery of the joint family could not grind down his unyielding independence of character.

"His brother-in-law, Ramsundar Vidyabhushan, was reckoned the leading man of the village and was of an exceedingly proud and haughty disposition. He had supposed that his sister's husband, Ramjay, would remain subordinate to him. But had he understood the true nature of his brother-in-law, he could never have

thought so. Some warned Ramjay that if he did not submit to Ramsundar, Ramsundar would find various ways to subdue him. But Ramjay was not a man to be frightened by any threat; he declared plainly that he would rather abandon his home than live in submission to his brother-in-law. Owing to his brother-in-law's malice, he sometimes had to endure, in effect, being ostracized by the village, and had to bear various forms of persecution and harassment, yet he was never troubled or unsettled by it."¹

As an example of his high spirit, it may be mentioned that when the zamindar intended to grant the family's new homestead in the village of Birsingha as rent-free Brahmottar land, Ramjay refused to accept the gift. Many in the village advised him at length to have the land registered in his name, but he would not honor anyone's request. For such a man, poverty itself becomes a form of majesty—it only causes his natural greatness to shine forth more brightly.²

¹ *My own composition, "Vidyasagar-charit"*

² *"Vidyasagar-jibancharit," composed by his brother, Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna*

But it is not the case that Tarkabhushan, in the pride of his independence, held himself aloof from everyone in contempt. Vidyasagar says:

"Tarkabhushan Mahashay was exceedingly free of guile and free of vanity; whether with the humble or the great, he behaved with equal kindness and courtesy toward all sorts of people. Those whom he judged to be hypocrites, he would not converse with even for the sake of expediency. He was outspoken; he was never afraid or hesitant to speak plainly for fear that someone might be displeased or offended. Just as he was plain-spoken, so too was he devoted to truth. Never, out of fear of anyone, nor at anyone's request, nor for any other reason, did he ever misrepresent anything. Whomever he found gentlemanly in conduct, he regarded as a gentleman; and whomever he found ungentlemanly in conduct, however learned, wealthy, or powerful, he would not consider a gentleman."¹

Meanwhile, Tarkabhushan Mahashay's strength and courage were also extraordinary. He always carried in his hand an iron club. In those days, for fear of bandits, people would not travel alone even in groups, but he traveled everywhere fearlessly, alone, with this iron club in hand; indeed, on two or three occasions

when attacked, he gave the bandits a fitting lesson! Once, at the age of twenty-one, he found himself facing a bear. "The bear began tearing at his whole body with its claws, while he continued relentlessly striking it with his iron staff. When the bear grew weak, he repeatedly kicked it in the belly and thus killed it."¹ Finally, walking four miles with his blood-drenched, wounded body, he sought refuge at a relative's house in Midnapore—and after two months, recovered and returned home.

If I mention just one more incident, the portrait of Tarkabhushan's character will be complete.

On Tuesday, the 12th of Ashwin, in the Shaka year 1742, Vidyasagar's father Thakurdas Bandyopadhyay had gone at midday to hold market at Komorgunj nearby. Ramjay Tarkabhushan had come out to bring him some happy news from home. Meeting his son on the way, he said, "A bull-calf has been born." Hearing this, Thakurdas returned home and made his way toward the cowshed; Tarkabhushan laughed and said, "Not that way—come this way"—and led him instead into the birthing chamber, pointing out to him the newly born infant, Ishwarchandra.

In this touch of playful humor, Ramjay's firm, exalted character appears to us as lovely as a mountain peak at dawn. Had such an ideal of a laughing, fiery, fearless, straightforward man not been so rare in Bengal, there would have been no lack of manliness among Bengalis. I have quoted his character description at such length because this poor Brahmin, though he could bequeath no other property to his grandson—since the inheritance of that imperishable wealth lies solely in the hands of God—left, whole and undiminished, the magnificence of his character as the portion of his eldest grandson.

His father, Thakurdas Bandyopadhyay, was likewise no ordinary man. When his age was fourteen or fifteen years, and when his mother Durgadevi, spinning thread alone at the wheel, was engaged in supporting her two sons and four daughters, Thakurdas set out for Calcutta in search of earning a livelihood.

¹ *My own composition, "Vidyasagar-charit"*

Upon arriving in Calcutta, he first lodged in the house of his relative Jagannmohan Tarkalankar. Knowing that if he learned English he might find employment with English merchants, he went every evening to the house of a ship's clerk to learn English. But by the time he returned home, the mealtime for the household's servants at Tarkalankar's house would have passed, and so he had to remain without food at night. Eventually, he took shelter at the house of a relative of his teacher. Owing to his host's poverty, some days he had to remain fasting the whole day. One day, driven mad with hunger, he went to sell his entire worldly possession—a single brass plate and a small pot—to a bell-metal shop. The shopkeepers set a price of five sikas, but did not agree to purchase; they said that buying old utensils from an unknown person often led to a great deal of trouble.

On another day, seeking to forget the pangs of hunger, Thakurdas left his lodging at midday and began wandering aimlessly through the streets.

"He walked from Baraabazar all the way to Thanthania, and became so exhausted and so overcome with hunger and thirst that he could walk no further. Shortly afterward, he came to stand before a shop; he saw a middle-aged widow woman sitting there, selling puffed rice and flattened rice. Seeing him standing there, that woman asked, 'Why do you stand there, my child?' Thakurdas, mentioning his thirst, begged for water to drink. She, in a kind and affectionate voice, asked Thakurdas to sit, and, considering it improper to give a Brahmin's son only water, gave him some flattened rice and water as well. Seeing how eagerly Thakurdas ate the rice, watching him closely, the woman asked, 'My child, it seems you have not eaten today.' He said, 'No, mother, I have eaten nothing at all thus far today.' Then that woman said to Thakurdas, 'My child, do not take water yet, wait a moment.' So saying, she quickly bought some curd from a nearby milkman's shop, and, giving him more flattened rice as well, filled Thakurdas's stomach with a proper meal; then, having learned his whole story from his own lips, she insisted and told him firmly, 'Whenever such a thing befalls you again, come here and eat before you go.'"¹

¹ *My own composition, "Vidyasagar-charit"*

Having thus, with much hardship, learned some English, Thakurdas first began earning a monthly salary of two rupees, and two or three years later, five rupees a month. At last, when his mother Durgadevi heard that her Thakurdas had received

a monthly salary of eight rupees, her joy knew no bounds, and she arranged, when Thakurdas was twenty-three or twenty-four years of age, his marriage to the second daughter of Ramkanta Tarkabagish of Ghatal, named Bhagavatidevi.

By the good fortune of Bengal, this Bhagavatidevi was an extraordinary woman. Her image has been published as a lithograph in the book **Vidyasagar**, composed by Sri Chandicharan Bandyopadhyay. Most portraits do not require prolonged viewing; they seem to exhaust themselves within a single moment. They may be skillful, they may be beautiful, and yet within them one does not find a fitting place for sustained contemplation—the eye's attention comes to rest merely at the surface of the canvas. But the depth and generosity of Bhagavatidevi's holy countenance cannot be exhausted even after long contemplation. In her high forehead, one sees the expanse of her intelligence; in her far-seeing, affection-radiating, wide eyes; in her straight, well-formed nose; in her compassionate lips; in her firm chin; and in a certain majestic, disciplined beauty pervading her entire face, the beholder's heart is drawn far away and far above—and one also understands why, in order to fulfill his devotional instinct, Vidyasagar never needed to enter the temple of any mythological goddess other than this mother-goddess of his own.

Bhagavatidevi's unwavering compassion perpetually consecrated her village and her neighbors. Tending the sick, feeding the hungry, and sharing in the sorrow of the grieving were her regular, daily practices. When the residence at Birsingha village was burnt down in a fire, and Vidyasagar tried to bring his mother to Calcutta, she said, "If I abandon this place and go elsewhere, what will those poor children, who eat here and study at the Birsingha school, have to eat while attending school?"¹

¹ **"Vidyasagar-jibancharit,"* composed by his brother, Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna*

Compassion may be seen in many other women as well, but there was in Bhagavatidevi's compassion a certain extraordinariness that was bound by no narrow prejudice. The compassion of ordinary people is like a matchstick—it kindles only under a particular friction, and remains confined within the small circle of habit and custom. But Bhagavatidevi's heart, like the sun, naturally radiated the light of her intelligence and compassion in all directions, without waiting for the

friction of scripture or custom. Vidyasagar's third brother, Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna Mahashay, has written in his brother's biography that once Vidyasagar asked his mother, "Is it better to spend six or seven hundred rupees uselessly on worship once a year, or to give some help, month by month, according to their circumstances, to the helpless, destitute people of the village?" Hearing this, his mother replied, "If the poor, helpless people of the village can eat every day, there is no need for worship." This is not a simple statement—that her pure intelligence and radiant compassion could so effortlessly cast off the veil of ancient superstition seems to me exceedingly wondrous. What binds a woman more firmly than the bonds of common custom? And yet, by what marvelous natural power of thought did she pierce through the crust of dead custom and rise into the eternally luminous, boundless sky of universal religion! How did it become so simple to her that the true worship of God is the service of man? The reason is that, more than any written scripture, the most ancient scripture of all was inscribed in clear letters upon her heart.

When the civilian officer Mr. Harrison came to Midnapore district on official business, Bhagavatidevi sent him a letter in her own name inviting him to dinner at her home; regarding this, her third son Shambhuchandra has written the following account:

"Mother was present at the sahib's meal and served him herself. The sahib was astonished that so old a Hindu woman would sit upon a chair during his meal and converse with him... The sahib, in the Hindu manner, bowed to the ground and greeted Mother as one greets a mother. Afterward, conversation on various subjects followed. Mother was an elderly Hindu woman, and yet her nature was exceedingly generous, her mind exceedingly elevated, and there was not the slightest superstition in her heart. Whether rich or poor, learned or ignorant, of high caste or low, man or woman, Hindu or of another faith—she regarded all with equal eye."

Shambhuchandra writes elsewhere:

"From 1266 to 1272 [Bengali era], a good number of widow remarriages of young widows were successively performed. My elder brother took special care to protect those who had married in this way from danger. He would often invite them to his own ancestral home. If anyone were to show contempt for these remarried

women, it seemed to me a matter of great astonishment. What is as firmly binding upon a woman as social custom? And yet, by what wondrous natural power of mind did she cross beyond the foundation of dead custom into the eternally luminous, infinite sky of universal righteousness! How did it become so simple to her that the true worship of God lies in service to mankind? The reason is that, more than any written code, the most ancient of all codes was inscribed clearly in her heart. For this reason, Mother would eat together, from a single vessel, with these married Brahmin women."¹

And yet, at that very time, in the movement for widow remarriage, the men of this country were secretly plotting to take Vidyasagar's very life, and the learned scholars of the land were pouring forth, upon his head, sophistical arguments churned from scripture and bitter invectives churned from language. But this woman never needed to search any verse of any scripture; the self-inscribed law of Providence lay open, day and night, within her heart. Just as Abhimanyu learned the art of war while yet in his mother's womb, so too had Vidyasagar studied that great scripture, written by the Creator's own hand, during the very time he lay within his mother's womb.

I fear that respected critics may think that this small essay on Vidyasagar has strayed somewhat disproportionately into discussion of his mother. But let them be assured of this: here there is no distinction between the character of the mother and the character of the son—they are, as it were, replicas of one another. Moreover, the history of a great man is preserved through his various outward deeds and life-events, while the history of a great woman comes to be written in the character of her son, in the deeds of her husband, and in such writing her name does not appear at all. Therefore, unless one properly examines how the biography of his mother has been inscribed within the life of Vidyasagar, the biographies of both remain incomplete. And we who have gathered here to worship the memorial image of that great mother—if she should, in some subtle, spiritual body, be seated here today in this assembly, and if this account of her character, offered by this unworthy devotee, should reach her hearing, then, in whatever portion of this composition her son's biography has served to exalt the greatness of his mother-goddess, there, without doubt, the most abundant tears of blessing will flow from her divine eyes.

In the first part of his primer, *Barna Parichay*, Vidyasagar gives the example of a well-behaved boy named Gopal, who does whatever his parents tell him. But when Ishwarchandra himself was of Gopal's age, in some respects he bore a much greater resemblance to the herdboys Rakhal than to Gopal. Far from obeying his father's word, whatever his father said, he would do the exact opposite.

Shambhuchandra has written:

"Father learned to understand his nature. On days when there was no clean cloth, Father would say, 'Today you must go to college wearing good clothes.' He would suddenly say, 'No, today I shall wear dirty clothes.' On the day Father said, 'Today you must bathe,' the moment he heard it, my elder brother would say, 'I shall not bathe today'; Father, even by beating him, could not make him bathe. Even if taken by hand and put down at the bathing-ghat of the mint, he would simply stand there. Father would slap him repeatedly and force him to bathe."¹

¹ *"Vidyasagar-jibancharit," composed by his brother, Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna*

At the age of five or six, when he went to the village primary school, the sort of civilized-society-condemned mischief he committed to provoke the wife of his neighbor Mathur Mandal was such that even the universally-condemned Rakhal of the primer, poor fellow, probably never did anything of the kind.

In gentle Bengal there is no lack of well-behaved boys like Gopal. If, in this land of feeble vigor, boys as wild and untamable as Rakhal—or as his biographer, Ishwarchandra—were more common, the accusation of feeble character leveled against the Bengali race might be wiped away. Well-behaved boys, no doubt, pass their examinations, obtain good employment, and receive handsome dowries at marriage, but it is from mischievous, disobedient, unruly boys that much may be hoped for one's country. Long ago, a certain fiercely unruly son of Mother Sachi in Nabadwip once fulfilled this hope.

But in one respect, the resemblance between him and Rakhal, his biographer's creation, did not hold. "Rakhal, on his way to school, plays along the road, deliberately delays, and arrives at the school last of all." But in his studies, the boy Ishwarchandra showed not the slightest slackness. With the very same fierce

obstinacy with which he set about doing the opposite of his father's orders and prohibitions, he went, with that same unyielding will, to his studies. That too was his own stubbornness maintained against adverse circumstances. This small, headstrong boy, lifting a great umbrella over his head, would walk from their lodging in Baraabazar to the Sanskrit College in Potoldanga; people would think an umbrella was walking by itself. This unruly boy's body was quite frail, his head enormous; the boys at school, for that reason, would tease him, calling him "Jackal-fruit" and its corrupted form "the fool with the head." He had a stammer then, and could not speak angrily.

This boy would go to sleep at ten o'clock at night. He would ask his father to wake him at two in the night. His father, by the striking of the Armenian church clock, would wake Ishwarchandra the moment it struck twelve, and the boy would remain awake studying for the rest of the night. This too was the stubborn boy's willfulness against his own body. His body did not fail to exact its revenge. He suffered severe, dangerous illnesses now and then, but even the discipline of illness could not overcome him.

Beyond this, there was much household work as well. At his lodgings were his father and his second brother. There were no servants. Ishwarchandra performed the cooking and other domestic tasks for everyone, twice a day. His brother Shambhuchandra has described this. Waking at dawn, Ishwarchandra would recite from his books for a while, bathe at the Ganges ghat, and then buy pounded fish and potato-eggplant curry vegetables at Kashinath Babu's market. He would grind the spices, light the oven, and cook. Four people ate at their lodging. After the meal, he would clean up the leftovers and wash the dishes before finding time to go and study; while cooking and while walking to school along the road, he would review his lessons.

Such was his situation. And yet, when he had leisure, he would treat any schoolmates present to sweets. Whatever monthly scholarship he received from school was spent on this. He would also borrow from the doorkeeper to buy new clothes for poor students. After returning home for the Puja holidays, "wherever he saw people in the village finding it difficult to make ends meet, he would not fail to help them as much as he could. If others lacked garments to wear, he would put on a simple loincloth and distribute his own clothes among them."

In that very state where a man is himself the chief object of pity, Ishwarchandra showed pity to others. From the very beginning of his life, this is what we see: that his character continuously fought against every adverse circumstance and won victory. For a boy in his circumstances, gaining an education was supremely difficult; yet this village boy, with a frail body and a huge head, obtained the title of "Vidyasagar" within an astonishingly short time. For a man of such poverty as his, to give charity, to show compassion, is exceedingly difficult; yet whatever circumstance he happened to fall into, no privation of his own could ever keep him from helping others—and this poor son of a poor father remains forever famous in Bengal under the name "Ocean of Compassion" (Dayar Sagar), a title that many a wealthy raja bahadur, possessed of abundant power, could never earn.

Upon graduating from college, Vidyasagar was first appointed Head Pandit of Fort William College, and later Assistant Secretary of Sanskrit College. In this line of work, he came into contact with several senior English officials, all of whom held him in the highest esteem and affection. In our country, many people sacrifice their own dignity and that of their nation in order to win the favor of Englishmen. But Vidyasagar never bowed his head to receive honors from the sahib's hand; he never, like the sahib-worshipping toadies of our country puffed up with English favor, tried to purchase honor at the price of self-abasement. One example will prove this. Once he had gone, on official business, to meet Mr. Kerr, the Principal of Hindu College. This civilization-proud sahib, propping his two booted feet up on the table, had considered it superfluous to maintain courtesy with a Bengali gentleman. Some days later, when this same Mr. Kerr came to Sanskrit College on official business to meet Vidyasagar, Vidyasagar stretched out, upon the table, his own universally-venerated feet, shod in slippers, and conversed with this arrogant English visitor. I daresay no one will be surprised to hear that the sahib took no pleasure in seeing his own gesture thus faithfully imitated.

Meanwhile, differences of opinion arose between him and the authorities regarding the college's system of administration, and Ishwarchandra resigned his post. Neither the editor Rasamoy Dutta nor Mr. Mouat, head of the education society, could, despite much entreaty and persuasion, get him to break his resolve. His relatives and friends asked him, "How will you manage?" He said, "I shall sell potatoes and eggplants, keep a grocer's shop, and get by that way." At the time, he was supporting and educating about twenty boys at his lodging—he did not dismiss a single one of them. His father had previously been employed—at Vidyasagar's

particular request, he had given up his job and settled at home, receiving household expenses. Vidyasagar, having given up his position, now began borrowing to send fifty rupees home every month. During this period, at Mr. Mouat's request, Vidyasagar taught an Englishman named Captain Bianche Bengali and Hindi for a few months. When the sahib came to pay him his salary at the rate of fifty rupees a month, he said, "You are Mr. Mouat's friend, and Mr. Mouat is my friend—I cannot accept payment from you."

In 1850 CE, Vidyasagar was appointed Professor of Literature at Sanskrit College, and in 1851 CE, Principal of that college. Having worked with great competence for eight years, when a new, young civilian officer became head of the Education Department and differences arose between them, he resigned his post in 1858. Vidyasagar was by nature a man wholly devoted to independence; he could work only if allowed uninterrupted freedom to pursue his own will—if his higher authority's opinion caused any obstruction, he could not, even slightly, alter the course of his own resolve accordingly. By the standards of the rules of official conduct, this was not commendable in him. But Providence had sent him to be sovereign; He did not grant him the qualities needed to work under others. Suitable subordinate officials are plentiful enough in Bengal; Providence deemed it unnecessary and unfitting to increase their number by employing Vidyasagar among them.

When Vidyasagar was employed at Sanskrit College, even while immersed in the work of the college, he had entered into a fierce social struggle. One day, sitting in the temple courtyard of Birsingha House, Ishwarchandra was discussing the Birsingha school with his father, when suddenly his mother came weeping into the courtyard and, mentioning the widowhood-misfortune of a certain young girl, said to him, "You have studied so many scriptures all this while—is there truly no remedy for widowhood in them?"¹ The mother's son set about seeking a remedy.

¹ *"Vidyasagar-jibancharit," composed by his brother, Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna*

Vidyasagar had a special tenderness, together with reverence, toward womankind. This too is a chief mark of his sublime manliness! Generally, we harbor a certain jealousy toward womankind; the ease and well-being of the helpless woman are,

to us, matters of supreme mockery, material for ridicule! This is one among the other marks of our meanness and cowardice.

In his childhood, Vidyasagar had found shelter at the house of Jagaddurlabh Babu. What he has written, in his self-composed memoir, concerning Jagaddurlabh's younger sister Raimoni may be quoted here:

"I can never, in this lifetime, forget Raimoni's wondrous affection and care. Her only son, Gopalchandra Ghosh, was nearly my own age. There is no doubt that the affection and care Raimoni bestowed upon Gopalchandra exceeded even what is proper and necessary for a mother toward her son. But my inward, unwavering conviction is this: in the matter of affection and care, Raimoni made not the slightest distinction between me and Gopal. In short, in the matter of affection, compassion, tenderness of feeling, freedom from guile, good judgment, and other such virtues, I have never, to this day, set eyes upon a woman equal to Raimoni. This compassionate woman's gentle image remains enshrined, like the image of a goddess, within the temple of my heart. Whenever the occasion arises to speak of her, I cannot help but weep as I recount her incomparable virtues. Some point to me as being partial toward womankind. I believe that this observation is not unjust. Whoever has directly witnessed Raimoni's affection, compassion, and tenderness, and has enjoyed the fruits of those virtues, and yet is not partial toward womankind—there can be no ingrate more base than he upon the face of this earth."

How many wretched souls among us have been deprived of the affectionate compassion of womankind? But the nature of a mean heart is such that, in the very proportion it receives unsought benefit, in that same proportion it becomes ungrateful. Whatever it obtains easily, it comes to regard as its due, and easily forgets whatever small return it might owe from its own side. We too, from time to time in this world, encounter a Raimoni, and when she comes to serve us, we accept all her care and affection with neglect, and consider ourselves to have done her a great favor; and when she comes to worship at our feet, we stretch out our mud-stained feet without hesitation, and, with utterly shameless presumption, truly believe ourselves entitled, as earthly gods, to receive the worship of womankind. But this sublime indifference of us mortal-gods toward the relief of the sorrows and the well-being of these serving, worshipping women can never be dispelled; for the reason is that we see the service rendered by women only as

entangled with our own worldly self-interest and comfort, and it therefore never penetrates our hearts deeply enough to awaken gratitude.

Vidyasagar first assisted Mr. Bethune in initiating and spreading female education in Bengal. At last, when he became distressed by the suffering of child widows and attempted to promote the practice of widow remarriage, a tumultuous uproar arose throughout the country, a mixture of Sanskrit verses and Bengali abuse. In that hail of scriptural quotation and invective, this Brahmin hero emerged victorious, proving widow remarriage to be sanctioned by scripture, and had it enacted into law.

At this time, Vidyasagar won yet another small social battle, which deserves brief mention here as well. At that time, only Brahmins were admitted to Sanskrit College; Shudras were not permitted to study Sanskrit there. Vidyasagar, overcoming all obstacles, granted Shudras the right to receive education at Sanskrit College.

After leaving his post at Sanskrit College, Vidyasagar's principal achievement was the Metropolitan Institution. This was the first instance of Bengalis, through their own effort and under their own management, establishing a college of higher education. This was the first foundation laid by Vidyasagar for the independent, lasting establishment of English education in our country. He who was poor became the country's foremost benefactor; he who was born into a family of custom-keeping Brahmin pandits waged a stern struggle to liberate society from one of custom's most rigid bonds; and he whose command of Sanskrit learning knew no limit was the very one who, in truth, planted the seed of English learning and rooted it firmly in the soil of his native land.

For the remainder of his life, Vidyasagar devoted himself, with wholehearted, life-consuming care, to nurturing this school and college, serving the poor and the sick, forgiving the ungrateful, showering his friends and companions with immeasurable affection, and, bearing within his flower-soft yet thunder-hard breast the unbearable thorn of sorrow, indelibly imprinted upon the mind of the Bengali people the grand ideal of his self-reliant, elevated, resolute character—and finally, on the night of the 13th of Shraban, 1298, departed from this earthly life.

Vidyasagar is famous throughout Bengal for his imperishable compassion. For nothing else so quickly moves our tearful Bengali hearts to praise as an act of compassion. But Vidyasagar's compassion reveals not merely the tenderness so characteristic of the Bengali heart—it also reveals a strength of character rarely found among Bengalis. His compassion was not merely a fleeting excitement of feeling; it possessed such majesty precisely because a resolute, self-directed strength of will always presided over it, unwavering. This compassion never hesitated, even for a moment, to plunge itself into hardship in its effort to lighten another's suffering. Once, while working at Sanskrit College, when the post of Grammar professor fell vacant, Vidyasagar requested Mr. Marshall to appoint Taranath Tarkabachaspati. The sahib said it was necessary first to know whether the man wished to accept the position. Hearing this, Vidyasagar set out that very day, on foot, a distance of thirty miles, to Tarkabachaspati's residence at Kalna. The next day, having secured Tarkabachaspati's consent and his letters of recommendation, he presented himself once more, in good time, before the sahib.¹ He applied all his strength and enthusiasm to the task of helping others. In this too, an obstinacy characteristic of him from birth would manifest itself. Generally, unless our compassion contains this same obstinacy, it becomes narrow and meager in its fruits, withering away; it never attains the greatness of manly stature.

¹ *"Vidyasagar-jibancharit," composed by his brother, Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna*

For compassion is not particularly a woman's virtue; true compassion is properly the duty of the truly manly. To fully discharge the obligation of compassion requires firm resolve and difficult perseverance. It often requires pursuing a far-reaching and long-sustained course of action. It is not merely the momentary suppression of self-interest, nor the temporary relief of an impulsive surge of feeling and the lightening of the heart's burden—it demands, over a long period, overcoming various obstacles by various means in order to achieve a difficult goal.

Once, some overzealous government official appeared in the Jahanabad subdivision to assess income tax. This clever hunter for the government was binding, in the net of taxation, two or three small traders whose income was too small to fall under the income tax, lumping their names together. Hearing of this, Vidyasagar immediately went to the assessor babu in Khadar village to protest. The babu, paying no heed, rebuked and silenced the complainants. Vidyasagar

immediately came to Calcutta and lodged a complaint with the Lieutenant Governor. The Lieutenant Governor sent the Collector of Burdwan, Mr. Harrison, to investigate. Vidyasagar went about with Harrison from village to village, examining the account books of the traders—thus, remaining single-mindedly devoted and singularly occupied for two full months, he succeeded in remedying this injustice.

Many more such examples could be given from Vidyasagar's life. But it is difficult to gather such examples elsewhere in Bengal. We proclaim our hearts to be exceedingly soft, but we do not wish to become entangled in any trouble. This lazy love of peace often leads us into a selfish cruelty. An English sailor, without a moment's thought, leaps into the sea after a drowning man; but we constantly hear, in our country, of one boat sailing past another in distress without making the slightest effort to help. Where compassion is not united with strength of will, it often becomes worthless.

It is not only in matters of crisis and perseverance that our compassion, confined to the inner chamber, refuses to venture forth. It is equally reluctant to transgress the artificial rules of social purity. I know that once, at a village fair, when a foreign Brahmin died, everyone, out of disgust, refused to arrange his last rites, and finally, planting an eternal thorn of grief in the hearts of his absent relatives, his body was thrown by the Dom—the corpse-handler—into the cremation ground, before the jaws of jackals and dogs. We can very easily exclaim "Oh, alas!" and shed tears, but on the actual field of helping others, we are obstructed at every step by countless natural and artificial barriers. Vidyasagar's compassion was robust, manly; therefore it was simple and unwavering; it never paused anywhere for subtle argument, never wrinkled its nose, never lifted its garment aside in disgust—it went straight forward, at a swift pace, along a direct line, without fear, without hesitation, to its task. The repulsive filth of disease never kept him away from the sick. Indeed, it is recorded in Chandicharan Babu's book that when a Mehtar woman at Karmatar was struck with cholera, Vidyasagar himself went to her hut and did not hesitate to tend to her with his own hands. During his residence at Burdwan, he cared for his poor Muslim neighbors as though they were his own kin, without distinction. Sri Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna Mahashay writes in his brother's biography:

"The hair on the heads of the women who ate at the common feeding-house looked repulsive for want of oil. My elder brother, observing this, was distressed, and arranged for oil to be provided, giving two annas' worth of oil to each. Those who distributed the oil, fearing lest they touch women of the lower castes such as cobblers, sweepers, and Doms, would pour the oil from a distance; seeing this, my elder brother himself would go and personally 'apply the oil' to the heads of these inferior and untouchable women."

The devotion that swells in our hearts upon hearing this story is not merely a response to Vidyasagar's compassion. Rather, seeing the unhesitating, robust humanity that shines forth from within his compassion, even our minds, long accustomed to contempt for this lowly caste, cannot help but be drawn, by our own hidden human nature, into reverence.

Many examples reveal the manly quality present within his compassion. In our country, those we praise as good-natured and gentle are generally excessively bashful. That is to say, they cannot bring themselves to cause anyone pain even when duty requires it. Vidyasagar's compassion contained no such cowardice. When Ishwarchandra was a college student, he had a particular bond of affection with their Vedanta professor, Shambhuchandra Vachaspati. When Vachaspati Mahashay, in his old age, wished to marry again, and asked his favorite student's opinion, Ishwarchandra expressed strong objection. Despite his teacher's repeated pleading, he did not change his position. Then Vachaspati Mahashay, paying no heed to Ishwarchandra's objection, married a beautiful young girl and brought her to the threshold of imminent widowhood. Sri Chandicharan Bandyopadhyay Mahashay, in his book **Vidyasagar**, describes the outcome of this affair; I quote it here.

"Vachaspati Mahashay took Ishwarchandra's hand and said, 'Come and see your mother.' So saying, he told the maid to lift the veil of the new bride. Then, seeing Vachaspati Mahashay's newly married wife, Ishwarchandra could not restrain his tears. Looking upon this maternal-figured girl, and thinking of her fate, he began to weep like a child. Then Vachaspati Mahashay, saying, 'Do not bring ill fortune, my boy,' took him out to the outer chamber, and, through various scriptural admonitions, tried to calm his agitated mind and comfort him. At length, he requested Ishwarchandra to at least take a little water. But Ishwarchandra, firm as

stone in his resolve, completely refused to touch water, saying, 'On this threshold, I shall never again touch water.'"

The robustness so evident in Vidyasagar's emotional nature is reflected fully in his intellectual faculty as well. The Bengali intellect is naturally exceedingly subtle. It can split a hair, but it cannot cut through great knots. It is highly refined, but not powerful. Our intellect, like a racehorse, excels in the flourish of hyper-subtle argument, but it does not pull a cart along the road of action. Although Vidyasagar had studied both Brahminism and logical philosophy as thoroughly as was proper, still, what one might call practical wisdom he possessed in ample measure. Had this practical wisdom been lacking, then he who once studied his lessons on parched rice and molasses could never have fearlessly given up his employment, taken up independent livelihood, and reached, by the middle of his life, a state of comfortable prosperity. It is astonishing that he who, out of compassion, sacrificed his own interest countless times over, who, out of self-interest, never for a moment allowed his lofty self-respect to bow even slightly, who, from the straight line of his righteous resolve, never wished to deviate a hair's breadth to the right or left under any temptation—by what breadth of intelligence and firmness of resolve did such a man become so well-organized as to become the refuge of thousands. Just as the cedar tree of the mountain peak, taking root in barren, rocky soil and bearing on its head the life-destroying snowfall of the Himalayas, by its own inner, unyielding strength, raises itself, abundant with fresh green foliage, to a simple grandeur that pierces the very clouds—so too did this son of a Brahmin, born amid poverty and every manner of adversity, by the sheer inherent strength and wisdom of his own being, raise himself, as if effortlessly, to such simplicity, such power, such elevation, such all-encompassing prosperity.

That he alone protected the Metropolitan Institution from every kind of calamity and obstruction, and honorably united it with the university, reveals not merely Vidyasagar's benevolence and perseverance, but also his alert and practical common sense. This is the true intellect of a real man—an intellect that does not entangle itself into helpless inaction through an overly subtle web of imaginary, far-fetched obstacles and calculations of consequence; this intellect, viewing the whole matter of the task and the field of action broadly and comprehensively rather than merely minutely, casts aside all hesitation, strikes at the very heart of the obstacle at hand within a moment, and acts heroically. Such robust, practical intelligence is rare among Bengalis.

Just as practical intelligence is necessary, so too is a robust common sense necessary in matters of religion and ethics, if true results are to be obtained. The poet has said: "Subtle indeed is the path of righteousness." The movement of righteousness may be subtle, but the principle of righteousness is simple and broad. For it belongs to all humanity universally, and to all time. It belongs neither to the scholar nor to the logician. But, by mankind's misfortune, man unwittingly renders complex and artificial everything he touches. What is simple, what is natural, what is open and generous, what need not be purchased at any price—that which Providence has freely bestowed upon common humanity, like light and air—man himself renders costly and inaccessible. That is why, for the propagation of simple truth and plain sentiment, one must wait for a transcendent greatness beyond the ordinary.

Vidyasagar's argument concerning the propriety of widow remarriage is likewise exceedingly simple; there is no extraordinary skill of novelty in it. He did not squander his strength creating some baseless realm of fancy while wholly disregarding the actual state of affairs. If I quote the lament with which he addresses us in his book on widow remarriage, my point will become clear.

"Alas, O people of India!... By the fault of habit, your intellectual and moral faculties have become so corrupted and so overwhelmed that, seeing the wretched condition of these unfortunate widows, it is difficult for your perpetually dry, unfeeling hearts to feel the stirring of compassion; and even seeing the country overflowing with a violent flood of the sins of adultery and infanticide, it is impossible for revulsion to arise in your minds. You are willing to let your own daughters, dear as life itself, burn in the unbearable torment of widowhood; you are willing to nurture them even when, overcome by uncontrollable passion, they become stained with the sin of adultery; out of fear of social shame, offering libations to your own righteousness, you are willing to assist in the murder of your own grandchildren and to become stained yourselves, along with your whole family, in the mire of sin; but, how astonishing! By adopting the ordinance of the scriptures and marrying them again, you are not willing to deliver them from unbearable suffering of widowhood, and to free yourselves from every peril. You imagine that, upon the death of a husband, a woman's body turns to stone; that sorrow ceases to feel like sorrow; that pain ceases to feel like pain; that uncontrollable passions are entirely uprooted all at once. But that this conclusion

of yours is utterly mistaken is proven by examples at every turn. Consider what bitter fruit the tree of society is bearing because of this negligence!"

Regarding the divinity of women and the greatness of a maiden's chastity, Vidyasagar did not sit down to conjure up copious clouds of ethereal, sentimental vapor; he took his clear, robust intelligence and simple compassion, and extended his hand, with true sympathy, to the actual condition and real suffering of society. Only he who lacks curd wishes to make gruel palatable with mere sweet words. But since Vidyasagar did not lack for curd, he had no need for eloquent flattery. Compassion is naturally drawn to the place of suffering. Vidyasagar saw clearly that, in real life, a girl does not suddenly become a goddess the moment she is widowed, nor do we, on our part, sit surrounded by a spotless world of gods and goddesses; in such a state she too suffers, and society too suffers countless misfortunes—this is a self-evident, daily truth. Vidyasagar could not remain still without adopting a fitting remedy for that suffering, that misfortune. We, in such matters, content ourselves by skillfully deploying poetic artifice to imagine an ideal widowhood in some self-created fantasy world. For we do not truly feel, within our own hearts, the pain that he, in his robust moral sensibility, so readily felt. That is why our writing on this subject displays craftsmanship, but not simplicity. True strength is always accompanied by a great simplicity.

This simplicity manifested not merely in opinion, but in social conduct as well. When Vidyasagar went to Kashi to visit his father, some money-hungry Brahmins there pestered him for money. Vidyasagar, judging by their condition and character that they were not deserving objects of compassion or reverence, immediately replied without hypocrisy: "If, simply because you live here, I were to revere and honor you as Vishweshwar himself, there could be no baser man than I." Hearing this, the Brahmins of Kashi grew furious and said, "Then whom do you revere?" Vidyasagar replied, "My Vishweshwar and Annapurna are present here, in my father and my mother."

The very Vidyasagar who never hesitated to spend money to relieve the suffering of even the lowliest class of people could not, by displaying false, hypocritical devotion, satisfy the demand of the Brahmins of Kashi. This is robust simplicity; this is true manliness.

Even in his own food and clothing, Vidyasagar maintained an unshakeable simplicity. And within that simplicity too, one finds evidence of firm strength. It has already been shown by example that he had not the least regard for the preservation of his own outward dignity. We generally try to gain respect by displaying great sahib-like manners or lavish extravagance. But the pomp of ostentation could never touch Vidyasagar's elevated, austere self-respect. Unadorned simplicity was itself his royal ornament. When Ishwarchandra was studying in Calcutta, his poor "mother would spin thread on her wheel and prepare cloth for both her sons, sending it to Calcutta." That coarse cloth, that mother-love-imbued poverty, he wore proudly upon his whole person throughout his life. His friend, the then Lieutenant Governor Sir George Halliday, requested him to dress appropriately for a formal audience. At his friend's request, Vidyasagar went to meet the sahib in a robe and cloak for a day or two only. But he could not bear that shame any longer. He said, "If I must come dressed thus, then I can come here no more." Halliday granted him permission to come in his accustomed dress. Vidyasagar never felt the need to abandon, even at the royal court, the slippers and thick cotton wrapper by which a Brahmin pandit customarily earns respect everywhere. In his own society, when this very attire was considered proper gentlemanly dress, he never wished, by putting on a different costume in a different society, to dishonor both his own society and himself thereby. The honor that Ishwarchandra bestowed upon plain cotton cloth and a plain shawl, we cannot bestow upon ourselves by donning the disguise of our present rulers—rather, we cast a doubled shadow of disgrace upon this already blackened deed. In this dishonored land of ours, we cannot say how such an unblemished ideal of manliness as Ishwarchandra's could ever have come to be born. As the cuckoo lays her egg in the crow's nest, so too did the Providence of human history secretly, through some hidden device, entrust to the land of Bengal the task of making Vidyasagar a man.

For this reason, Vidyasagar was solitary in this land of Bengal. Here it seemed he had no one truly kindred to him. In this country, for want of a companion of equal worth, he suffered a kind of exile throughout his life until death. He was not a happy man. Whatever unfeigned humanity he perpetually felt within himself, he could never find its reflection among the crowd around him. He did good and received ingratitude in return; he received no assistance in his hour of need. He saw, every day, that we begin things but do not finish them; we make a show but do not act; we do not believe in what we perform; we do not practice what we believe; we can

compose an abundance of words but cannot make the smallest self-sacrifice; we remain satisfied by displaying arrogance, but do not strive to earn merit; in every task we expect help from others, yet we tear the sky asunder over the faults of others; we take pride in imitating others, we derive our honor from others' favor, we make our "politics" by casting dust in the eyes of others, and our chief purpose in life is to grow intoxicated with devotion to ourselves through our own verbal cleverness. Toward this weak, petty, heartless, inactive, arrogant, hair-splitting race, Vidyasagar harbored a deep, silent scorn. For he was, in every respect, the opposite of all this. Just as a great tree gradually raises its head into the empty sky above the small forest thickets surrounding it, so too, as he grew in age, Vidyasagar rose gradually, in soundless, distant solitude, above all the unwholesome pettiness of Bengali society; from that height he granted shade to the afflicted and fruit to the hungry, but he remained entirely apart from the clamor and clatter of our thousands of ephemeral societies and committees. He is no longer present today for the hungry, the afflicted, the orphaned and the helpless, but the imperishable banyan tree of his great character, which he planted in the soil of Bengal, has become a place of pilgrimage for the entire Bengali race. Coming there, we shall leave behind our triviality, our meanness, our futile ostentation; casting off the finest webs of argument and the coarsest inertia, we shall carry away with us the teaching of simple, robust, unshakeable greatness. Today we know Vidyasagar merely as a vessel of learning and compassion—but the more we grow into true manhood through contact with this vast world, the more we advance, as men should, into the difficult and expansive field of action, the more directly and intimately we become acquainted with manifold heroism, valor, and greatness, the more we shall come to feel, within our own hearts, that it is neither compassion nor learning that constitutes the chief glory in Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar's character, but his invincible manliness, his imperishable humanity; and the more we feel this, the more complete will our education be, and the more fulfilled the purpose of Providence—and Vidyasagar's character shall remain established, for all time, in the national life of the Bengali people.

Bhadra, 1302

THE LIFE OF VIDYASAGAR — I

The revered Srijukta Shivrath Shastri Mahashay, in the essay he has published concerning the life of Vidyasagar, has quoted at its outset the following verse from the Yogavashishtha:

Taravo'pi hi jīvanti jīvanti mṛgapakṣiṇaḥ

Sa jīvati mano yasya mananena hi jīvati

Trees too sustain life, beasts and birds too sustain life; but he alone truly lives whose mind lives by the act of contemplation.

The life of the mind is the activity of thought, and in that life alone lies true humanity.

The vital breath binds the entire body into unity and regulates its manifold functions as a single whole. When that breath departs, the body becomes five-fold dissolved; its unity breaks, and the portion of earth returns to earth, the portion of water merges into water. It is this ceaselessly active, tireless vital breath that lifts this bodily vessel above mere earth and water, sets it apart, unifies it, and fashions from it a self-moving and wondrous magic wielding of the senses.

That life of the mind which the scriptures call *manana*—contemplation—likewise unifies the mind, redeeming it from all its triviality and instability, raising it up and giving it shape. The mind that gains unity through such contemplation does not lie scattered in fragments; it does not drift like a heap of straw upon the current of outward impressions.

A certain thoughtful English writer has said:

Rare is it to find a man who can stand firmly upon his own feet, who is conscious of the workings of his own mind, who possesses the strength to direct and, when needed, to check the flow of action, who can hold himself above the rushing crowd and has a clear understanding of whence that tide of humanity comes and whither it flows.

What this learned writer has said may be summarized thus: rare indeed is such a man—*mano yasya mananena hi jīvati*.

What is it that sustains, in the common man, this illusion of possessing something called a mind? Nothing but habit and custom. Its dull limbs are bound together by the glue of habit; they have not been fused into one by the bond of vital breath. Its motion is but the age-old, ever-flowing current of the crowd; its today is merely the habitual repetition of countless yesterdays.

As straw drifts upon water, so a fish does not drift. The path of straw and the path of fish are never the same. The fish, driven by the urgency of self-preservation in pursuit of its food, must forever seek out its own path; the straw feels no such need at all.

The mind that lives by the activity of contemplation must likewise, for the sake of self-preservation, seek out its own path by itself. To drift along with the crowd is, for such a mind, wholly impossible.

That singularly noble distinction which sets Vidyasagar apart from the ordinary Bengali has been made vividly clear by the revered Shastri Mahashay through this single verse of the Yogavashishtha. Compared to us, Vidyasagar possessed, as it were, one life more. He was not merely twice-born; he was doubly alive.

For this reason, his aims, his conduct, his manner of action were not as ours. Before us lie our personal joys and sorrows, our personal gains and losses; before him too, no doubt, these same things stood—but above them stood also the joys and sorrows of his inner life, the gains and losses of his mental existence. Beside those inner joys and sorrows, outward joy and sorrow counted for nothing.

Our outward life too has its aim, which, gathering all together, may be called in a single word: self-interest. Our eating, our clothing, our sleeping, our working—all are branches of self-interest. This is the root-knot of our outward life.

The inner life we attain through contemplation has as its central aim the ultimate good—*paramārtha*. Self-interest and the ultimate good are the two masters of these two households, the outer and the inner. To live in harmony between them is the ideal of human life. But now and then, caught in the crisis of worldly affairs, there comes a moment when, as the saying goes, "one abandons half"; then it is

self-interest, not the ultimate good, that must be sacrificed—and one whose inner life is vigorous performs this sacrifice without hesitation.

Since the minds of most men are not truly alive, scripture and custom, by forcibly winding the mechanism of our mental faculties, lend it a kind of artificial motion. It is only by that borrowed force that we, for so long, do not compassionate but merely give charity—do not feel devotion but merely worship—do not think but merely act—do not perceive but merely judge; and yet, for that very reason, with eyes tightly shut, we pronounce with utmost vehemence and utmost brevity what is good and what is evil. Thus, though the ultimate good—that living deity—remains unawakened within us, its lifeless image somehow maintains its outward pomp.

This lifelessness is betrayed by the unthinking observance of fixed rule. In a society where one man is exactly like another, and no particular distinction can be found between one age and the next, it may certainly be said that the ultimate good has no living presence there, and that the activity of contemplation has come to a complete standstill.

Thus has the poet of our land said: *gatānugatiko loko na lokaḥ pāramārthikaḥ* — that is, mankind follows the beaten track; the one who follows the beaten track is not devoted to the ultimate good, nor can one devoted to the ultimate good follow merely the beaten track. The poet has grasped this profound truth.

Whatever else Vidyasagar may have been, he was not one who followed the beaten track. The chief reason he was not is that the life of contemplation was, for him, the principal life.

Of course, in every land those who follow the beaten track are the majority. But in a land where the vitality of freedom and the ferment of manifold action are ever present, that immortal nectar wells up within the gathering of society which gives life to the mind and quickens the activity of thought.

Yet everyone knows how sharply a writer like Carlyle has censured the profound torpor of the common masses in his own country.

Carlyle says of one whom he calls a "hero" —

The hero is he who lives in the inward sphere of things, in the True, Divine and Eternal, which exists always, unseen to most, under the Temporary, Trivial; his being is in that; he declares that abroad; by act or speech, as it may be, in declaring himself abroad.

That is: he alone is a hero who dwells within that inner realm of truth, of the divine, of the eternal, hidden beneath the pile of worldly things—that truth, that divine and eternal substance which forever reigns, unseen by most, within the trivial and transient dealings of everyday life; his very existence lies in that inner realm; and by deed or by word, in expressing himself outwardly, he but extends that inner kingdom into the world without.

In Carlyle's view, such men are not mere pegs on which to hang clothes, nor mere machines for digesting food; they are living men—that same truth again: **sa jīvati mano yasya mananena hi jīvati**. Or, in the words of another poet, they are not mere followers of custom; they are devoted to the ultimate good.

As we feel self-interest keenly and intensely, so do the men of contemplation feel the ultimate good with equal immediacy, and are moved by it with equal ease. That second life of theirs, that inner vital breath, which hungers, which feels pain, which through the nectar of joy rises immortal even against worldly loss and death—of its very existence we remain unaware.

There was once a day when the earth, bearing only its molten mass of metal and stone, simply circled the sun. Through long ages, by the unfolding of some strange vital force within it, its solid form became filled with life and beauty.

Human society too, through the power of thought, has over long ages built a strange and wondrous mental creation. That work of creation goes on unceasingly, but it seems as though it has not yet everywhere taken firm root. Now and again, at some particular point, when it becomes fully manifest, its difference from all around appears exceedingly great.

In Bengal, Vidyasagar had, for this very reason, to appear utterly apart from the ordinary run of men. It is not that we are wholly incapable of feeling the influence of the ultimate good. Now and then, after long suppression, some sudden gust of

spiritual storm arises from within, drawing us, in defiance of self-interest and convenience, momentarily away from comfort and habit—but once such gusts have passed, we forget them entirely, and return again to circling within the daily round of eating, drinking, and amusement.

The reason is that our mental life has not attained maturity; it has not been built up whole and entire from beginning to end. We feel the mere hint of consciousness and of feeling, but it has no permanence. Between feeling and the accomplishment of action there is no unbroken connection, no inevitable momentum. No living, conscious nerve-bond has been established linking action to feeling, and feeling to mind.

Those in whom that bond has been established, who have attained that second life, cannot help but be driven, to the very last, by the ultimate good. They possess a second consciousness—and all the pain of that consciousness lies beyond our comprehension.

Since Vidyasagar was born into this world bearing that second consciousness, his suffering knew no bounds. Amid the numbness on every side, this anguished, vast heart labored on alone—helplessly, solely by the force of his own vital spirit, solely at the urging of his own pain—carrying out his own work in solitude.

By the reckoning of an ordinary man, none of this labor was in the least necessary. Through scholarship alone, and through the sale of school textbooks, he could easily have earned wealth and gained ample honor and standing in the world. But by his own reckoning, all this labor was utterly essential; otherwise the extra life he bore within him would have been stifled for want of breath—his wealth and his honor could never have preserved it.

The sorrow we feel at the suffering of child-widows is, for us, but a fleeting stir of emotion. Their pain does not touch our life. For we are creatures of habit; wherever there is no feeling for the pain of others, there we remain unconscious. We cannot, in true, direct, and immediate fashion, feel all the sorrow and humiliation of their deprived lives as our own sorrow and our own humiliation. But Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar had to bear the burden of his own excessive consciousness. He could not shield himself from others' suffering behind the stony barrier of habit, custom, and numbness. And so, just as we struggle anxiously to relieve our own suffering,

he strove—perhaps with even greater vital urgency, with a resolve doubly redoubled—to rescue widows from that untouched, unfelt cruelty. As strongly as self-interest moves us, so much more strongly, and more, did the ultimate good move him.

I have given but one such example. Yet it may be said that in every deed of his life it becomes clear how far removed we stand from that realm of consciousness, that world of contemplation, in which he dwelt; his thought and his endeavor, his intellect and his feeling, were not as those of ordinary men—they were devoted wholly to the ultimate good.

Because a man like him, so devoted to the ultimate good, was born into a Bengal fallen away from such devotion, because he was struck and repelled again and again by the stony wall of surrounding numbness, Vidyasagar seems to have passed his laborious life ever in anguished bitterness. Like a rebel without an army, he seems to have scorned all around him and carried alone upon his own shoulders the victory-banner of life's battlefield, right to the very edge of the field. He called upon no one, he received no answer from anyone—and yet obstacles beset him at every step. His contemplative inner being drove him to act with overpowering passion, but the world of outward, worldly life gave him no reassurance. In the great work he had undertaken, he alone was also the one who carried it through to its completion.

An exact parallel to Vidyasagar cannot be found in modern England. Only with Johnson do we see a certain remarkable resemblance in several respects. That resemblance lies not so much in outward deeds—for in deeds Vidyasagar was far greater than Johnson—but in the simple, powerful, and unaffected humanity of the inner being. Like Vidyasagar, Johnson was rough without and tender within; Johnson too was extraordinary in learning, witty in conversation, quick to anger, tender in affection, fearless in opinion, unfeigned in heart, and self-forgetful in his eagerness to help others. Even unbearable poverty could not, for a single moment, cloud his sense of self-respect. I give here a portion translated from what the famous English writer Leslie Stephen has said concerning Johnson—

"He could not be won over on a matter of opinion by mere words, nor would he accept any doctrine incapable of producing genuine feeling. Moreover, his emotions were as deep and as tender as they were unfeigned. How pure was his love for his aged and plain-looking wife! Wherever the smallest good could be done, how ardently his compassion sprang forward; with what manly dignity he guarded his self-respect against all the temptations of Grub Street—there is no need to repeat these well-known facts. But it seems worthwhile to draw attention to the extreme rarity of such virtues. Perhaps many love their fathers—fortunately this is true—but how few are there whose filial devotion can overcome the fear of appearing foolish or being reproached! How many are there who, to atone for some long-past act of disobedience, would journey to the marketplace of Uttoxeter many years after their father's death, and stand bareheaded in penance? When we see a woman cast out by society lying helpless by the roadside, most of us feel but a momentary pang of pity. Perhaps we call a policeman, or put her into a hired carriage and send her to the public poorhouse, or write a letter of protest to the Times against the inadequacy of the parish poor-relief system. But it is perhaps better not to ask how many good men there are who would carry her upon their own shoulders to their own homes, relieve all her wants, and set her life in proper order. In the lives of many great men we find virtue and good conduct; but even among good men, such an ideal is rarely to be found—one whose life is not shaped by prevailing custom, or whose feelings can break through the well-worn channel of habitual convention. The chief reason for the affection we come to feel for Johnson's character is that the foundation on which his life turned was greatness, not mere slavery to custom. Addison had shown how a Christian ought to die; but his own life flowed all too smoothly through the comforts of the Secretary of State's office and marriage with a Countess, and nothing but excessive indulgence in port wine ever seriously disturbed his pulse or his temper. But this other stern old pilgrim, who fought his way to peace through a wilderness of inward and outward suffering, who descended into the shadow of death caught in the snare of this world's illusion, and who, after long struggle and great pain, freed himself from the bondage of despair and doubt—at the hour of his death, a deeper wave of feeling rises within us. When we see how tender, how grave, and how simple were the feelings of this man's final days, we spontaneously feel that this humble gentleman, who lived and died observing the highest decorum, now stands in the presence of a nobler being than himself."

Reading this description, the resemblance between Vidyasagar and Johnson comes readily to mind. Vidyasagar too could not confine himself within petty, narrow, habitual propriety; his own overflowing tenderness and devotion, his vast and boundless heart, breaking through every rule of custom, expressed itself in extraordinary form—as is shown in many incidents recorded in his life's story.

Here I translate a portion of what Carlyle has written concerning Johnson—

"He was a man of strong soul and great worth. To the end, much within him remained undeveloped; given favourable circumstances, what might he not have become—poet, prophet, sovereign ruler? But after all, no man has any need to complain of his 'circumstances,' his 'time,' and such things; that is but a fruitless lament. His time was a bad one—well and good; he came precisely to make it better. Johnson's youth was beset by poverty, friendlessness, hopelessness, and every misfortune. Let that be; but even had his outward circumstances been most favourable, Johnson's life could hardly have been anything but a life of suffering. Nature, as the price of his greatness, seemed to say to him: dwell amid a wilderness of sickly misery. No—I think, rather, that suffering and greatness were closely, even inseparably, bound together. Whatever the reason, poor Johnson had ever to go about girded with sickness, with bodily and spiritual anguish. Picture him once—that diseased body of his, that hungering, vast heart, and that unutterably surging mass of thought, wandering the earth like an exile beset with dangers, eagerly seizing upon whatever crumb of spiritual sustenance came his way, and if he found nothing else, at least the language of the schools and the mere business of grammar! Of all England, the largest heart there was, was his—and yet his allowance was fourpence-halfpenny a day. Yet that heart remained unconquered, a mighty fortress, a truly human heart! I always remember that story of his shoes at Oxford—how, with the toes cut open and the bare bones of his feet showing through, this destitute student went about in winter in his worn-out shoes; how some compassionate, well-to-do fellow-student secretly left a new pair of shoes at his door; and how this poverty-stricken student, his feet exposed to the bone, picked them up, brought them close, held them for a long, brooding moment before his dim, thought-clouded eyes—and then flung them far out of the window. Wet feet, be it so; hunger, be it so; frost, be it so; all these can be borne—but not charity. We cannot bear charity! Here is nothing but harsh self-reliance. Wretchedness, squalor, distracted suffering, and want without end—and yet, withal, an inward greatness and manliness! This very flinging away of the shoes—

this is the very mould of this man's life. Here is a man of singular integrity (*originality*)—no follower of the beaten track for you, no debtor, no beggar living upon others' charity. Whatever else, let us stand upon our own foundation—let us stand shod in the very shoes we ourselves have procured. If it come to that, let us walk through mud, let us walk upon ice, but let us walk upright; let us walk upon the truth Nature herself has given us, not upon a copy of what others have given."

Whatever may be said of the particular incident Carlyle records, its essential truth applies to Vidyasagar exactly. He was not one who followed the beaten track; he was independent, self-aware, devoted to the ultimate good; to his very last day, the shoes upon his feet were his own, made by his own hand. Our only regret is that Vidyasagar had no Boswell; the sharpness, strength, depth, and warmth of heart that shone forth daily, inexhaustibly, in his conversation, have today become irrecoverable. Without a Boswell, Johnson's humanity could never have given a lasting ideal to society. Fortunately, Vidyasagar's humanity will leave its imprint upon his works—but his extraordinary greatness of mind, which he so often scattered abroad in mere spoken words, will survive only in incomplete form, within the dim and imperfect memory of popular hearsay.

Agrahayan, 1305

RAMMOHAN ROY

Read at the memorial assembly in honour of Raja Rammohan Roy, 5th Magh 1291, at the City College Hall

We generally live from day to day occupied with but a handful of small tasks; spider-like, we draw threads from within ourselves and weave about us on every side a web of self-interest, and then, swelling with pride, hang suspended in its very centre. Our whole life lies absorbed in daily trivialities, and we find a placid contentment in the womb of this darkness and narrowness. Each of our days is but a repetition of the one before; our little lives tell no continuous story of advancement. This filling of the belly each day, this sleep each night—the repetition, some three hundred and sixty-five times a year, of this same round of events and their attendant rites—this, then, is our life; and in this we can find no true reverence for ourselves. Vanity and self-conceit we do not lack, but genuine reverence for ourselves we have none. There exists a certain lowly order of living organism that knows only to move about within a fixed range, revolving its whole existence through the same circuit. We find little to distinguish ourselves from such creatures. We possess a daily motion, but no yearly motion—we revolve about ourselves, circling our own navel, yet advance not a single step along the orbit of eternal life. This most curious spectacle of self-circumambulation may be witnessed on every side: some, tracing but the faintest mark upon the earth, exhaust the long journey of a lifetime within a space no larger than a needle's point, precisely as a spinning-top does. Seeing this everywhere, day after day, our faith in humanity diminishes, and with it goes the strength to perform humanity's weightier duties. For this reason it becomes utterly necessary for us, from time to time, to cast our gaze upon the great souls among us. By reflecting upon the lives of great men we may come to understand what humanity truly is; we may grasp how much is meant when we say, "We are human"; we may learn that we are not merely machines built of bone and flesh for the purpose of eating, but that we carry within us tidings of a nobler lineage. Only when we feel within our hearts that we are indeed something greater than ourselves—that is, truly human, superior in great measure to the common run of men—does our head desire to rise, and the pull of the earth grow less upon us.

Great souls are, no doubt, a source of glory and an ideal for the whole of humankind; but there is no doubt that they are, in particular, the special glory of

their own nation. By a "source of glory" is not meant merely a source of common vanity; a source of glory means a source of instruction, a source of strength gained. It is not enough to feel a mere reverential astonishment upon witnessing the great deeds of great men—the more we come to regard them as "ours," the more love is kindled for them, the more do their words, their deeds, their character grow vivid and living before us. Those in whom we take pride, we do not merely revere—we consider them "ours." For this reason, the light of their greatness falls upon us with peculiar force, illuminating our own faces above all others. As a child, forsaking a thousand mighty strangers, runs in time of danger to take refuge in its father's lap, so too, in the days of our country's misfortune, forsaking all others, we become desperate to find the unshaken refuge of our own countrymen among the great. At such a time, none but they can bring solace to our despairing hearts. Picturing England's distress, the poet Wordsworth, forsaking all the other great men of the earth, called out in a plaintive voice to Milton alone, and said: "Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour! England hath need of thee." A nation in whose midst no great son has been born—to whose face shall it turn? How wretched its plight! But a nation in whose midst great souls have indeed been born, and which yet, through torpor of imagination, through paralysis of heart, can in no wise feel their greatness—how much more wretched still its misfortune!

What misfortune indeed is ours! Each of us, thinking himself a great man, offers homage and oblation at his own feet; swollen by the force of vapour, we puff up our petty hearts into things still more petty. We take our small, everyday great men, the puffed-up sages of Bengali society, and seat them for a day or two upon thrones of sand, garlanding them with flowers and sandal-paste, satisfying in mere sport our craving to worship greatness; in imitation of foreigners, we call meetings on the slightest pretext, raise subscriptions, and stage a mere pretence and pageant of hero-worship. When Mr. Jones departs from this station, we hang his portrait in the market square; when Mr. James arrives, we place garlands at his feet. Of money, of courtesy, of generosity, we see no lack. It is only our truly native-born great men whom we keep far from our hearts, entrusting to foreigners the duty of honouring them, while we sit at ease and remain, day after day, thrice each day, endlessly busy fashioning ever-new idols of clay.

The foundation of present-day Bengali society was laid by Rammohan Roy. All of us who dwell in Bengal are heirs to his estate; we live within the mansion he built. Were we to examine carefully how much he did for us, how much more he was

capable of doing, we should be filled with profound devotion toward him and renewed faith in our own people. Should anyone slight us by calling us Bengali, we shall answer: Rammohan Roy too was a Bengali.

There is yet another grave necessity for reflecting upon the character of Rammohan Roy. In our present age, an ideal such as his has become utterly indispensable. We might cry out to him in a plaintive voice: "Rammohan Roy, ah, wouldst thou were living today! Bengal hath sore need of thee. We are a people glib of tongue—teach us to labour. We are full of self-conceit—teach us self-sacrifice. We are of shallow nature—teach us, amid the currents of revolution, to stand firm by the strength of moral character. We are blinded by the glare of outward light—teach us to choose wisely by the aid of that ever-shining inward light of the heart, and to hold fast to whatever is lasting and truly beneficial for our country."

Rammohan Roy performed genuine work. In his time, florid rhetoric had not yet flourished to its present degree, and consequently it did not receive the acclaim it now enjoys. But another point must also be noted. There are certain periods when work grows crowded, when the marketplace of activity is bustling, when many gather together with much clamour and set up, as it were, a veritable factory of enterprise—at such times there is a certain excitement in either doing work or merely feigning to do it. The very pomp of such activity generates a theatrical thrill, intoxicating men; especially amid tumultuous uproar, all sense of outward reality is forgotten, and a kind of frenzy ensues. But in Rammohan Roy's time, Bengali society knew no such condition. In that age, there was no intoxicating pleasure to be found in mere activity—no joy in frantic bustle, in noisy exertion; one had to perform every task alone, unnoticed, and with calm deliberation. As an island rises silently, ever so slowly, from the depths of a companionless, majestic ocean, so too did his resolve, ceaselessly and silently, fill his deep heart and gradually take visible shape in action. In a turbulent, restless stream, one may see today a sandbank form and tomorrow crumble away—such breaking and reforming may make poor work, but excellent play; in their age, things were not so. Unless work was done under the influence of greatness, under the inspiration of the heart's own devotion, there existed then no other motive for doing it at all. And yet obstacles to work were, in those days, far greater than now. Rammohan Roy knew not the slightest temptation of fame. In none of the many labours he undertook did he ever expect renown from his contemporaries and countrymen. Calumny and reproach rained down upon his head unceasingly, like the showers of Sravan—yet nothing could

turn him from his labour. What unshakable refuge he found in his own greatness! What complete fulfilment his heart found within that greatness itself! What selfless, profound love he bore for his native land! His countrymen did not join him; he himself stood far apart from the people of his time—and yet, by the power of his vast heart, he was able to maintain an unbroken and steadfast bond with the true core of his nation. Neither the bonds of foreign education, nor even the far graver oppression of his own countrymen, could sever that connection. By the strength of this bond, free of all resentment, he was able to dedicate himself entirely to his country. What did he not do! Be it education, politics, the Bengali language, Bengali literature, society, or religion—there was no field into which he did not, for the sake of his unfortunate homeland, thrust his hand in earnest labour. And in what task did he ever shirk! Whatever advancement Bengali society has since made, in whatever sphere, is but the fuller flowering, page by page, of what his own hand first inscribed. Everywhere in Bengali society his memorial pillars stand raised on high; the seeds he sowed in this wilderness have, day by day, grown into trees spreading branch upon branch. Sitting beneath their vast shade, shall we not remember him?

His greatness is manifest both in what he did, and, equally, in what he refrained from doing. Though he accomplished so much, he sought no self-glorification in any of it. In founding the Brahmo Samaj, he expressly forbade the enshrining of any image—whether of himself or of anyone else. Living in the age he did, he might easily, had he wished, have claimed for himself the seat of an eleventh incarnation. He might have fabricated some new religion of his own devising; instead, he chose to propagate the ancient faith. He might have set himself up as a guru; instead, he acknowledged the ancient sages as his gurus. He strove with all his might to make his work endure, but made not the slightest effort to make his own name endure—indeed, he worked against it. Such self-effacement is nowhere to be seen today. Now we must fill great newspaper columns, drinking incessantly the nectar of our own name until a kind of intoxication is induced, merely to keep alive our enthusiasm for work; whatever small service we render our country, we contrive to accomplish it in some foreign guise, striving to make that work a marketable commodity attractive to foreign eyes, and, along with it, to export in abundance our own petty name for sale abroad. Occupied ceaselessly with the clamour of self-praise and the single-minded chanting of flattering multitudes, we lose both the capacity and the desire to understand calmly the true merits of any matter; we

continue whirling in great delight within a vortex of confusion, imagining all the while that we are advancing along the path of progress with lightning speed.

The reason we are incapable of such self-effacement is that we cannot restrain ourselves. At the mere onset of the slightest wave of feeling, it is we ourselves who rise foremost to the surface. Because we cannot conceal ourselves, we must forever be thinking how we appear to others. Those who are great in a middling way do indeed wish to accomplish their noble purpose, but along with it, they also wish to make themselves known. This is a most awkward predicament. When one becomes a rival to one's own resolve, then naturally one's regard for oneself grows somewhat greater than one's regard for the resolve itself. The resolve then often becomes feeble and loses its aim; it wavers this way and that, changing with every word spoken. Some good work such a person may indeed accomplish, but the work never becomes wholly, flawlessly good. How can one who stands as an obstacle in his own path overcome the thousand obstacles of the world? He who, setting himself aside, establishes his good work in the very midst of the world, founds his beneficent purpose upon a lasting foundation. But he who founds all his work upon himself alone—when he departs, his unfinished work departs with him; and if its scattered ruins are left lying in the dust, its foundation can nowhere be found. Rammohan Roy, forgetting himself, planted his own great will within the heart of Bengali society; and for this reason, though he himself is no longer present, that will of his lives on today, working ceaselessly, day after day, throughout the length and breadth of Bengali society. All the people of Bengal may erase his memory from the tablet of their hearts, but they cannot obliterate the lineage of that immortal will from Bengali society.

I have said before that petty souls rise upon the current only to be swept away by it. Only one whose soul possesses true greatness can master himself even while borne along by that current. Consider how extraordinary was this power of self-mastery in Rammohan Roy. In his earliest youth, when, driven by the thirst of his heart, he wandered restlessly throughout India, what profound darkness reigned both within him and without! When, in an instant, that darkness of the long night was consumed and burned away, and a piercing light blazed forth within his heart, even that light could not overwhelm him. That fire, that radiance, he was able to contain within his own heart. If a flash of lightning should penetrate a mine long accumulated with the darkness of ages upon ages, what havoc would ensue—the very depths of the earth would be riven asunder a hundredfold! Even so, how many

men could easily contain such a sudden overflow of new knowledge? No mere youth, certainly, could do so. But Rammohan Roy was exceedingly great; and so, amid this deluge of knowledge, his heart remained unshaken; amid this revolution of thought, he was able to lift his head high and discern that which would become, for our country, a source of abiding good. Can patience be maintained in such times? In our present age, we scarcely know what patience means at all. But what extraordinary patience Rammohan Roy possessed! Setting aside all else, he sought to blow upon that very fire concealed within the mountainous heap of ashes, and thereby to kindle it anew—he did not resort to lighting some foreign matchstick merely to startle and dazzle for a moment's effect. He knew that the spark of fire still remaining within the ashes lay hidden deep within the hearts of the people of India, and that once that fire was kindled, it would never again be extinguished. Without such strength, such patience, how could he have been a king? The Emperor of Delhi gave him the title of Raja, but the Emperor of Delhi's own Emperor sent him forth as a true king. Within Bengali society, in the midst of India, he established his royal throne. Shall we not, then, honour him?

When Rammohan Roy was born in India, on every side reigned the darkness of a night as black as death. Death itself stalked the very sky. He had to wage war against falsehood and death. These sorcerer-kings named Falsehood and Death possess no true strength, no infallible weapon, no ground on which truly to stand; their throne is founded solely upon the darkness of ignorance and upon a certain indefinable terror. Our own ignorance, the very weakness of our hearts, is their strength. Even the greatest coward may laugh at the mention of a ghost's name in the light of dawn, but in the darkness of night, the sound of a dry leaf, or the mere shadow of a blade of grass, finds occasion to exercise a cruel dominion over our hearts. The tyranny of that false, indefinable fear is more powerful by far than genuine fear of real danger. Where else is man so utterly helpless, so utterly without recourse, as in the grip of ignorance? When Rammohan Roy awoke and cast his gaze upon Bengali society on every side, he found it to be precisely such a realm of ghosts. In that charnel-ground, only the ghost of the once-living Hinduism of ancient times still held its spectral sway. It possessed no life, no true existence—only ritual observance and fear remained. In that darkness of night, in that cremation-ground, amid that terror, he who alone advanced, uttering the words "Fear not," is one whose true greatness we, in the light of this present day, can perhaps scarcely comprehend. He who sets forth to slay a venomous serpent fears only for his own life; but he who goes to kill a mere harmless house-snake finds his fear of some

indefinable misfortune growing stronger than any fear for his life. In just such a way, in Rammohan Roy's time, the crumbling foundation of Hindu society, riddled with a thousand cracks, had, generation upon generation, through the influence of antiquity and inertia, grown monstrously and grotesquely swollen with a thousand imagined calamities lurking within those very cracks. Rammohan Roy advanced fearlessly to free society from these thousand serpentine bonds. But this dreadful bondage clung to society as tightly as the bonds of affection cling to the heart; and so all Bengali society rose up in anguished outcry against Rammohan Roy. Today, even our children trample with smiling faces upon the corpses of those very serpents; we mock them now as harmless, toothless snakes—we have quite forgotten their once-terrible power, the fascination of their gaze, the dreadful embrace of their long coiling tails.

Once destruction is begun, a kind of intoxication takes hold. As there is joy in creation, so too there is a certain terrible delight in annihilation. Those who have read Rajnarayan Babu's **Ekal ar Sekal** [**This Age and That**] know what manner of intoxication arose among Bengali youths when, having received their new English education, they emerged from Hindu College. Banding together, they would deal grievous blows, drawing blood, as it were, from the very heart of Hindu society, and then parade that blood openly in triumphant celebration. With harsh laughter and the clamour of merciless festivity, they made the already grim spectacle of that charnel-ground even more terrible still. To them, nothing in Hindu society was good, nothing was sacred; had there been scattered here and there the bones of Hindu society requiring proper funeral rites, they would not even have shown enough reverence for the memory of ancient Hindu society to gather up its ashes decently and cast them, with due sorrow, into the waters of the Ganges before returning home in mournful silence. Rather, like the attendant ghosts and spirits of the God of Death, they would revel in wild frenzy, drinking wine from skulls in that very charnel-ground. Considering the circumstances of that age, we cannot blame them overly much. Such is ever the way of a first revolution. Once the mind is set upon destruction, the joy of annihilation grows ever greater. At such a time, if a little seems bad, then everything begins to seem bad; if the outside seems bad, the inside too begins to seem bad. But Rammohan Roy—he who was the very first to release the volcanic upheaval of revolution within present-day Bengali society—never fell prey to such intoxication. With a tranquil mind, he examined all things, both good and bad, with care. He kindled a light within the darkness of Hindu society of that age—but he never lit a funeral pyre. This is

Rammohan Roy's chief greatness. He restored to life the Hinduism that lay entombed beneath mere outward ritual and lifeless incantation. Upon that dead weight beneath which Hindu religion lay crushed, growing daily more listless and moribund, upon that heap of inert stone beneath which the very heart of Hinduism lay stupefied and numb—upon that dead weight, upon that inert heap, Rammohan Roy struck with tremendous force; its foundation trembled; it was riven asunder from top to bottom. The vast and ancient temple of Hindu religion, decayed with age, had been crumbling daily; at last the divine image of Hinduism itself could no longer even be seen, buried beneath an ever-mounting heap of splintered wood and dust from the crumbling shrine. Within its depths, darkness grew ever denser; creatures great and small, all manner of reptiles, made their burrows there; and everywhere thorny weeds sprang up, their countless roots binding those ancient ruins together in ever-new tangles of decay. Hindu society, forgetting the divine image itself, had taken to worshipping this very heap of rubble, and, crushed beneath its mountainous inert weight, was daily losing all consciousness. Rammohan Roy shattered that ruined shrine. Everyone said he had struck a blow against Hindu religion. But it was he, indeed, who preserved its very life. For this, all India remains grateful to him. In what a perilous age was he born! On the one side, the shore of Hindu society lay crumbling into decay; on the other, the mighty flood of foreign civilization advanced with the speed of lightning—and Rammohan Roy came and stood, with his unshakable greatness, exactly between the two. The dam he built there caused the tide of Christian revolution to break and recede. Had a soul as great as his not been born in that age, Bengal's Hindu society would, by now, have suffered some truly lamentable and catastrophic deluge.

Here perhaps a word or two might be raised concerning Rammohan Roy's liberality. That immortal fire born of the sages' hearts, hidden within the heap of ashes—he it was who, blowing away the ashes, brought that fire again to light. But what need was there to do all this? He knew so many languages, had studied so many religions, and held reverence and affection for the truths in every faith alike—he could easily have gathered the fire of religion from abroad. Why, then, did he confine himself so narrowly, setting aside all other faiths, to establish India's own religion within India itself? The answer is this: were religion, like science or philosophy, merely a matter for the intellect—were it not something to be felt, gained, and cherished within the heart—were religion merely an ornament to be hung upon the wall of one's house, and not something that must govern and direct every small act of our worldly life—then such particularity would not have been necessary. One could

then simply have decorated one's house with various foreign ornaments. But since religion must be something received into the heart and put to use in the daily conduct of life, and not merely kept at a distance, for that very reason the religion of one's own land is specially suited to that land. Brahma is the God of the whole universe, yet He is, in a particular sense, especially the Brahma of India. The people of no other land know Him as Brahma; foreigners can never truly understand, under some other foreign name for God, the very feeling we experience when we utter the word "Brahma." Whether they understand it or not, I cannot say—but the feeling that arises in our minds at the utterance of the name Brahma will never arise under any other foreign name for God. Brahma is no mere word to be spoken lightly—no name that can be wished into being, or given away at will. Brahma is the treasure won through the many disciplines of our forefathers; renouncing all worldly ties, devoting their entire lives, our sages, through meditation in solitary forests, attained our Brahma. We are the heirs of that spiritual inheritance. No other nation has performed precisely such austerities, has been placed in precisely such circumstances, and thus no other nation has attained Brahma in this particular way. Each nation, through its own particular discipline, attains a particular fruit, and that fruit it bestows upon other nations. In this manner, the whole world benefits. Shall we, then, willingly neglect and cast away the fruit of all our austerities? For this reason I say: though Brahmoism is indeed the religion of the whole world, and though we neither can nor wish to deprive the world of this faith, yet by virtue of particular circumstance and particular discipline, it has become, in a special sense, India's own Brahmoism; and for Brahmoism, the world remains indebted to India in particular. Were I, out of mere liberality, to say that Brahmoism exists within Christianity, that Brahmoism exists within Islam, such a statement, by virtue of the sweet-sounding word "liberality," might please the ear well enough—but it would nonetheless be a false statement. Truth, therefore, demands that we set aside false liberality. For this reason, Rammohan Roy's Brahmoism is the very Brahmoism of the ancient sages; it must be propagated throughout the whole world, and for that very reason, it must first and foremost be planted, in a special sense, within India itself. India certainly does not lack for poverty; having lost the living God, India has been sinking ever deeper into an abyss of degradation. Rammohan Roy opened the door to that treasury in which our ancestral wealth lay hidden—shall we not, then, with proud and willing hearts, dispel our poverty and sorrow? What cruel hand would seek to deprive our humble, destitute nation of this one sole glory? Let me ask yet another question: does the attainment of Brahma not bring complete fulfilment to our hearts? Is our Brahma merely the dry

Brahma of philosophical treatises? Were that so, could the sages have devoted their entire lives to immersion in this Brahma, could they have found in this very Brahma the final extinction of all their worldly joys and sorrows? Does the God of love exist only in foreign faiths, and not in our own? No, it is not so. Our Brahma is *raso vai saḥ*—He is the very essence of joy. Our Brahma is the embodiment of bliss. "*Ko hyevānyāt kaḥ prāṇyāt yadeṣa ākāśa ānando na syāt. Eṣa hyevānandayāti.*" It is because this very bliss fills the entire sky that we live, and live in joy. For this reason there is joy in the flower, joy in the breeze. For this reason there is joy in beholding a son's face, joy in meeting a friend, joy in the love between man and woman. For this very reason: "*Ānandaṁ brahmaṇo vidvān na bibheti kadācana*"—he who has known this bliss that is Brahma fears nothing, ever. Once this joy is attained, fear remains no more, and that joy knows no ending. Even after attaining so much, can any longing remain in the heart? Such a boundless source of joy the sages discovered and left for us—why, then, should we go elsewhere in search of it? This joy, earned by the sages, earned by the people of India, earned by ourselves, we shall distribute throughout the whole world. It is for this reason that Rammohan Roy gave us back our own Brahmoism. Our Brahma is nearer to us than the nearest, more intimate than our very soul—no god of any other land is such as He. Rammohan Roy, following the path shown by the sages, discovered that closest of all kinsmen—our own—and showed us too that very same path. Had he, out of presumption, chosen instead some new path of his own devising, how far indeed should we have had to wander—and never would our hearts have found such boundless fulfilment; nor would all the people of India, in trusting faith, even have turned their gaze toward that new path of his. That he did not abandon the ancient truth out of petty vanity, nor for the sake of some tempting phrase such as "liberality"—this is his supreme greatness.

Indeed, upon a little reflection, it becomes clear that matters of intellect and matters of feeling do not follow the same law. A statement of pure knowledge suffers little when translated into another tongue; but a matter of feeling, once uprooted from its particular language and transplanted into another, loses its vitality—it neither flowers nor bears fruit, and gradually withers away and dies. When I, an Indian, call upon God as *Dayamoy* (the Merciful One), that word "Dayamoy," echoing forth from the vast heart of the whole of India, past and present, gathers up the aspirations of all India and rises before God in what a deep and majestic resonance! But if I translate it and call Him "the Compassionate Lord," it becomes, in Webster's dictionary, no more than a rustling among a handful of

dry pages. Therefore, complete liberality cannot apply to matters of feeling. In many contemporary religious essays one finds writers translating the English word and using in its place the Bengali word *bishwas* ("belief"). This reveals their poverty of heart; it shows that, for want of true feeling, the priceless treasury of feeling within their own native tongue remains closed to them. The word "bishwas" has its own particular and proper use in particular contexts, but to use "bishwas" in place of the word "bhakti" (devotion) is intolerable. It is precisely under the influence of such spurious liberality, breeding a narrow view toward one's own native feeling, that such mischief arises. If cheap cloth can be easily bought within our own country, what benefit is served to the country by imposing a tariff upon it and then importing that very same commodity, in a different form, from abroad? Can the general populace then easily afford to wear that cloth? In one sense, no doubt, this constitutes liberality toward foreign lands—but this cannot be called true liberality. Should anyone say of me, merely because I choose to build my own house, that I am, out of narrowness of heart, holding myself apart from others? If I have no house of my own, how then shall I ever offer shelter to another? Rammohan Roy wished to establish that home of ours upon a firm foundation. And yet it is plainly evident that he bore no ill will toward others. Call him narrow-minded if you will, then—so be it. That we are able to appropriate to ourselves the vital force present in plants and animal flesh is due to the fact that we ourselves possess life. Without our own vital force, we could never acquire new vitality. Were we without our own life, plants, animals, birds, insects, and other living creatures would instead consume us. In this world, the dead cannot endure; they are absorbed into the living. Had Rammohan Roy seen that we possessed no life at all, he would have left us, like the corpses of the Parsis, exposed within the towers of silence, to become the sustenance of other living creatures such as Christianity. But instead of doing so, he began instead the work of healing. He saw that life still lay dormant within us. That very life he awakened. Let it be our endeavour to revitalize this life of ours—only then shall we, by degrees, be able to make foreign truths truly our own. Yet there is no assurance that we shall, at all times and in all circumstances, be able to accomplish this fully. Just as our digestive fire lacks that universal liberality capable of digesting all foods equally, so too does our heart suffer the same limitation—what is to be done, there is no remedy. For this very reason I say: let us first, invoking the name of Brahma as uttered by the ancient sages of the Upanishads, establish the throne of God within our own land; only thereafter may attention be turned toward universality. As God is the God of all, so is He the God of each individual; as He is the God of the intellect, so is He the God

of the heart; as He is the deity of the whole universe, so too is He our household deity. We may regard Him as king, and we may equally regard Him as father. But no king-god is as near to us as our father-god, none so ready to answer the deepest needs of our hearts. Even so is Brahma the household deity of India, the father of India. None is nearer to India's heart than He, none understands India's needs so well as He. Brahma alone is India's living, awakened deity; Jehovah, God, or Allah cannot fully capture the entirety of our feeling. Rammohan Roy understood this, through the liberality of his own heart. With a narrower vision, this profound and heartfelt need of India might perhaps have escaped his notice. That Brahma whom our forefathers, the sages, through manifold austerities, invoked and established within the hearts of the Indian people—that very image of Brahma, which has lain obscured for so long beneath the darkness of our degradation—Rammohan Roy has set himself to reinstate within our hearts once more. Only if we ourselves fulfil that noble resolve of his shall we be able to raise for him an eternal monument upon this earth. Let us first establish the eternal Brahma within the temple of India; and in the end it shall come to pass that seekers of truth from every quarter of the globe shall come, in ever-growing throngs, eager for the vision of Brahma, to India's sacred pilgrimage-ground. Then indeed shall Raja Rammohan Roy be triumphant. Then shall triumph that ancient truth, whose banner he bore as he stood upon Indian soil. Then, in the triumph of Rammohan Roy, in the triumph of the sages, in the triumph of truth, in the triumph of Brahma, shall lie the triumph of India herself.

Magh, 1291

THE MAHARSHI'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Read on the 3rd of Jyaishta at the birthday celebration of Maharshi Devendranath

Today is the eighty-eighth annual birthday celebration of our venerable father. Let us receive the sanctity of this day of celebration with special reverence in our hearts.

Making fertile many lands with its life-giving touch, quenching with its sacred stream the thirst of many villages and cities, the Jahnavi at last, where she stands directly before the great ocean, prepares to complete her long pilgrimage within that unfathomable peace—that meeting-place of river and sea is a place of pilgrimage. Our father's sacred life has today laid open before us just such a place of pilgrimage. The single-minded current of his long life, ever active in righteous deeds, has today come face to face with that boundless, shoreless sea of eternal rest, and there we too shall stand still for a moment, our heads bowed. Let us reflect and see: long ago, one day, awakened suddenly from deep slumber by the touch of some blessed ray of sunlight from heaven, melting the hard casing of frost into a flow of tears, this life began its auspicious journey—then its thin, clear stream flowed on, cutting its arduous path sometimes through light, sometimes through darkness, sometimes through hope, sometimes through despair. Obstacles appeared, growing larger day by day; hard masses of stone rose up blocking the way—but unable to check the current, these very obstacles only stirred it into redoubled turbulence, and the insurmountable difficulty bowed its head before that irresistible force. This stream of life, growing ever greater, ever more expansive, descended into the habitations of men, consecrating both its banks with new life; it acknowledged no obstacle, took no rest, let nothing divert it from its goal—until today that single-minded, undivided current of life has overspread and risen above both banks of this world. Today it has stilled all its striving, all its restlessness before the ultimate consummation, and has extended itself toward complete self-surrender—preparing to unite, in a life fulfilled, with the boundless ocean of life eternal.

May this majestic vision of confluence, unveiled today before the eye of our meditation, bless us all.

Wealth is a chief obstacle on the path of the thirst for immortality and the search for the eternal. A mere wall of gold, rising high, can block from our sight the immortal light of the infinite sky beyond. It is in the very possession of riches that the impoverished heart comes to feel its fulfilment; it says, "Now indeed I am satisfied—the world sings my praises, my glory radiates across the land, my grandeur pierces the very clouds, my comforts pile up daily, layer upon layer—what more could I want!" Alas, poor wretch—when the inmost soul of all mankind has cried out weeping, "What use to me is that which does not make me immortal? *Yenāhaṁ nāmṛtā syāṁ kimahaṁ tena kuryām*"—when woman, lifting her joined palms toward the inmost sky, prays, "Give me truth, give me light, give me immortality; *asato mā sadgamaya, tamaso mā jyotirgamaya, mṛtyor māmṛtaṁ gamaya*"—you have said instead, "I have wealth, I have honour, I have comfort, I am master, I am lord—what more could I want!" Such is the mockery of riches—that to the impoverished soul, wealth itself takes on the semblance of the highest fulfilment. At today's celebration we have gathered to remember the greatness of one whose spiritual vision, even in early youth, had already crossed this hard and well-nigh insurmountable wall of riches and opened inward toward the depths within—when he lay wholly enveloped and enshrouded in the seamless cloak of wealth and rank, how was it that this nectar-word found its way, piercing through the very grossest covering of riches, silencing the songs of flatterers, tearing asunder the dense curtain of comfort, pleasure, and pomp, and entered his ear: *"Īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ"*—all that exists, see it enveloped by God, not by wealth, not by self-interest, not by pride of self. He who is *"Īśānaṁ bhūtabhavyasya,"* our Lord of all eternity, master of our past and future—how was he able, in a single moment, to recognize Him, rising above the sway of riches and above all earthly lords, as his sole and only Master? Neither his own lordship in this world, nor the honour paid to his wealth and rank in society, could keep him blind to this truth.

Again, behold this: when this vast wealth, with all its pomp and grandeur, suddenly began collapsing on every side under the thunderbolt-stroke of misfortune—when debt, swelling monstrously in a moment, threatened to devour his house and home, his happiness and prosperity, his very food and clothing—even then, just as the lotus lengthens its stalk above the rising floodwaters to keep its immaculate beauty turned unsullied toward the sun's rays, so too did he keep his own unclouded heart, rising above the entire flood of calamity, turned open toward the pole-star's changeless light. Prosperity could not deprive him of the attainment of

immortality, nor could adversity rob him of its harvest. That very hour of misfortune he transformed, through the light of his own soul, into an hour of blessing; even as his worldly wealth lay scattered in the dust, he stood above his own poverty and called out, again and again, to all India, on the occasion of distributing the wealth of the eternal spirit. In the days of his prosperity, he had stood as a beggar with empty hands at the door of the Lord of the universe; in the days of adversity, he threw open, in the very glory of his spiritual wealth, the treasury of Brahma and took upon himself the task of distributing the Lord of the Universe's bounteous grace.

Religion lifted him from the soft bed of luxury and set him standing in the midst of its own path—*kṣurasya dhārā niśitā duratyayā durgam pathas tat kavayo vadanti.* The poets say that path is exceedingly difficult, like the sharp edge of a razor. The religion of custom, long practised through habitual observance, may be followed blindly, thoughtlessly, even in a state of inertia, and by following it one may easily win fame and honour in the eyes of the world. That comfort, that easy honour of religion, our father set aside. Upon that path, difficult to tread as the sharp edge of a razor, he set his foot fearlessly. In seeking to follow the dictates of his own conscience rather than mere social conformity, he never became one who rebelled against or destroyed himself.

For those born into households of wealth, accustomed from their ancestors' time to receiving society's esteem, it is by no means easy to hold aloft, unwavering and with a firm grip, the banner of inward conviction against the taunts and hostility of friend and foe alike, breaking through the tightly woven web of established social custom—particularly in times of worldly crisis, when the goodwill of all becomes essential, how difficult that must be can easily be imagined. In that youthful age, in the days of worldly misfortune, without regard for the vast ancestral prestige he possessed within aristocratic society, our father openly proclaimed before a hostile society the spiritual worship of that eternal Brahma, revered by the sages of India—that peerless Lord of all gods.

After this, another day of graver struggle arrived in his life. Everyone knows that diversity proves the unity of the universe; the more precisely defined the diversity, the more clearly manifest becomes the unity. Religion too, resting upon the histories of various societies, is attempting, in various distinct voices and various curious forms, to prove from every quarter one eternal truth. If one seeks to erase

the specifically Indian form of that which India has attained through her own particular discipline, uprooting it from India's history and mixing it with the shape and nature of other lands, this violates the very law of diversity that underlies the world's unity. Each person attains full excellence, and thereby attains true humanity, only according to his own nature; ordinary humanity itself rests upon the foundation of individual particularity. Humanity is, in essence, the same in the Hindu and in the Christian; and yet Hindu-particularity is itself a special treasure of humanity, and Christian-particularity too is a special gain for humanity; to wholly reject either would leave humanity impoverished. Whatever is best in India's wealth is universal; whatever is best in Europe's wealth is universal too; and yet, since Indianness and Europeanness each possess their own distinct value, the two cannot simply be merged into one. The cloud rains down water from the sky, and the lake, remaining upon the earth, gives water too; although the substance given is the same, yet by virtue of this very difference, the cloud is specially blessed according to its own nature, and the lake too is specially fulfilled according to its own nature. Were these two made one, the total quantity of water would not increase in the least, but the world would suffer a real loss.

When the young Brahmo Samaj, under the influence of Western education, had forgotten this truth—when it considered the preservation of religion's native form to be mere narrowness—when it believed it possible to make the fruit of foreign history ripen upon an Indian branch, and thought that in precisely such an endeavour true liberality was rightly preserved—our father refused to surrender religion's universal truth, along with its native character, into some confused amalgamation. Because of this, a separation occurred between him and many spirited young men of extraordinary talent and religious zeal who had followed him. Setting aside all questions of who was right, let us today remember only the firmness, the courage, the strength that were required to accept such a separation. In the face of the powerful hostility of prevailing custom in modern Hindu society, who else could forsake the capable supporters of the very society that had followed him, and empty himself of every kind of support on every side, except one whose inmost heart was ceaselessly filled with the imperishable, flowing stream of the universe's primal power?

Just as we have seen him remain unshaken, taking fearless refuge, in both prosperity and adversity, so too we saw him remain firm in true faith—once against the current society, and again in favour of Hindu society itself; we saw that the

apprehension of grave and imminent loss could not shake him. In the midst of Hindu society, he had stood alone even in the darkest of days; in the Brahmo Samaj, at the very dawn of new hope and new enthusiasm, he stood alone once more, having renounced everything anew. His only prayer remained: *māhaṁ brahma nirākuryāṁ mā mā brahma nirākarot*—may I never renounce Brahma; may Brahma never renounce me.

That divine light which had touched his forehead, piercing through the golden darkness heaped up by wealth and riches, amid the unsated desires that surround youth; whose serene, unwavering vision of God's gracious countenance remained unshaken even in the dark, frowning shadow of gathering misfortune, before the raised thunderbolt of impending poverty; in whose ear, even in the darkest hour, the words of religion, "Fear not," rang out clear above every worldly fear; who, at the height of strength and the fullness of power, severed himself by the strength of his faith from every support and, without hesitation, took refuge in the one supreme support—today the evening of his long life, so full of holy endeavour, has arrived. Today the voice from his weary throat is faint, but the silent utterance of his now nearly completed life is clearer still. Today the labour of this earthly life is finished, but the single-minded devotion that has risen, from the very root of his lifelong striving, to the world above, stands revealed today in silent manifestation. Today he stands at the outer threshold of this vast worldly existence, but that unshaken peace which, amid all the world's joys and sorrows, its partings and unions, remained ever fixed within him like a mother's eternal blessing, now surrounds him today, radiant as the beautiful glow of a sunset at day's end. In the workshop of life he obeyed the command of the Lord of his life; today, in the resting-place, he prepares to set forth upon the path of final union with the Lord of his heart. On this sacred occasion we have gathered here to bow before him, to receive with bowed heads the last rays of the sunset, adorned with the beauty of peace, of his fulfilled life.

Friends, you whose lives his life has illumined moment by moment, whose words have given you strength in weariness and comfort in sorrow—you who have come to make manifest your devotion by turning his birthday into a day of celebration—if I, concerning my own father, come forward here for a brief moment on this festive day with a special claim upon him, I beg your forgiveness. Those closest to a great soul seldom find the opportunity to see him wholly, completely, in his entirety. The relationships of this world—diverse relationships, diverse interests,

diverse opinions, diverse inclinations—make it difficult to preserve the purity of judgment; small things loom large, transient things obscure the eternal, and one's true perception is daily fragmented by the world's many shocks and counter-shocks. For this very reason, this birthday celebration of our father is a particularly blessed occasion for his kindred. Only at a certain distance can greatness be seen whole and entire, from beginning to end; and today, taking advantage of this festival, sitting together in one company with the devoted assembly gathered from outside, we too shall come to that same distance. We shall see him detached from all the trivial bonds of this narrow household existence; sweeping aside all the dust raised by the daily use of our confined lives, we shall see him, in his true majesty, seated upon the eternal throne of his life, amid the vast sky, amid stainless peace, amid the unbroken stream of divine, gracious joy. For all the rebellion, all the fickleness, all the wrongs we have committed, bewildered in the whirl of worldly existence, we shall today, with undivided heart, pray for forgiveness at his blessed feet. Today, raising him above our worldly selves, above all our petty claims upon him, we shall see him joined in vast and eternal relation with the universe and the Lord of the universe; and we shall pray to him for this blessing: that we may regard as our foremost ancestral inheritance that treasure of eternal life which he has gathered within his own being; that the example of his life may protect us from the blindness of wealth, deliver us from the terrors of adversity, hold us fast in firmness of faith; and that we may never, in the languor of comfort or the despair of hopelessness, forget that mantra of the sages which he has caused to resound in our ears—

Māhaṁ brahma nirākuryāṁ mā mā brahma nirākarot.

Anirākaraṇaṁ astu, anirākaraṇaṁ me'stu.

Friends, brothers, standing before this eighty-eight-year-long life, rejoice, take heart. Know this: *satyam eva jayate nānṛtam*—truth alone triumphs, not falsehood. Know this: religion's fulfilment lies in religion itself. Know this: that which we grow proud of, calling it wealth, is not wealth; that which we fear, calling it calamity, is not calamity. Our inmost soul has the right to take refuge in that supreme peace which lies beyond both prosperity and adversity. *Bhūmaiva vijijñāsitavyaḥ*—desire, with your whole life, to know the Infinite, and prove the Infinite through the whole of your life. Offer this prayer: *āvīrāvīrma edhi*—O Self-Revealing One, be revealed unto me—so that, once revealed to me, that revelation may shine forth easily to all mankind beyond myself; so that my life may remain

consecrated within the eternal life of all humanity, and my brief span of human birth may become, for all time, truly fulfilled.

Ashadh, 1311

PRAYER ON THE OCCASION OF THE MAHARSHI'S FIRST RITES

O Supreme Father, O Father of fathers, He whom, through his fatherly nature, we came to know as father in this world—today marks the eleventh day since he departed from this earthly life. His whole life rose ceaselessly toward Thee, like the sacred upward-tending flame of the sacrificial fire. Today, at the close of his long life's journey, with what peace, with what nectar of immortality hast Thou anointed him—he who never desired heaven, whose sole and ultimate longing was, "like shade and sunlight," to be united with Thee in the realm of Brahma; with what sweet and blissful fulfilment Thou hast now enveloped him lies beyond the reach of our understanding—and yet, O Thou who art all-benevolent, placing complete faith in Thy perfect and benevolent will, we bow to Thee again and again. Thou art eternal truth; in Thee, all our thoughts of truth find their utter fulfilment. Thou art eternal goodness; in Thee, all our righteous deeds find their complete success. All our unfeigned love, O embodiment of bliss, finds its beautiful consummation in Thee alone. Knowing that all the truth, all the goodness, all the love of our father's life has found ineffable fulfilment in Thee, we, his brothers and sisters, with folded hands, proclaim Thy victory.

Most relationships in this world expect return in kind, but a parent's love lies beyond all expectation of recompense. It reveals itself transcending sin, transgression, unworthiness, and ingratitude alike. It is not a debt—it is a gift. It is like light, like the breeze; it has ceaselessly protected us from our infancy, yet none has ever asked its price. For that unsought, that boundless goodness of our father's love, O Father of the universe, we bow before Thee today.

Nearly fifty years have now passed since, after our grandfather's death, a sudden crisis of overwhelming debt descended upon this household—of this, all are aware. How our father, standing alone amid manifold adversity, swam across that impassable sea of debt and reached the far shore; how he rescued from the very jaws of ruin, and preserved for us, the provision of our daily bread that we enjoy today—this is now hard even for us to imagine. What do we truly know of the history of that storm! How much sorrow, how much anxiety, how much striving, how many reversals of fortune he had to endure, day after day and night after night, over so long a span of time—to think of it now makes the flesh shudder. He

had been raised amid incomparable wealth and luxury—and yet, faced suddenly with this reversal of fortune, with what unwavering courage he stood firm! Those who grow up amid abundant wealth and unobstructed pleasure, whose strength of character remains untested from childhood for want of the shock of adversity, wrapped instead in the cushioning of luxury and indulgence—who is more helpless than they in times of crisis? For such persons, their own immature strength of character and undisciplined impulses become a graver enemy than any outward danger. At such a time, in such circumstances, that the son of a wealthy man should curtail his lifelong habits, set at naught the immense prestige of his wealthy society, and, with calm and disciplined heroism, take this vast family upon his own shoulders and set forth against overwhelming misfortune—and emerge victorious—how can we ever fully comprehend in our minds that extraordinary courage, that self-restraint, that firmness of resolve, that moment-by-moment sacrifice; and how, correspondingly, can we ever feel gratitude equal to it! Behind all our present food, clothing, and shelter, may we ever humbly feel the touch of that unshaken, powerful right hand in that time of calamity, and the blessing of that very hand.

This wealth, sufficient to relieve all our wants, he preserved entirely by his own strength; had this been achieved through the aid of unrighteousness, we should today hesitate to offer our reverence to that father before the Witness of all hearts. He preserved his righteousness first, and only afterward preserved his wealth—what we have gained today, he did not mix with the taint of falsehood; what we enjoy today, we are entitled to accept, with pure and untroubled hearts, as the very grace of God.

In that time of crisis, he did not lack for worldly-wise friends; had he wished, he might perhaps, through clever contrivance, have recovered a far greater portion of his former estate, so as to remain, in the pride of wealth, an object of envy among the rich men of Bengal. That he did not do so should make us doubly grateful to him today.

One day, in the midst of dire crisis, the path of the good and the path of the pleasant lay open before him at once. The possibility of losing everything stood before him then—he had a wife and son, he had his honour and reputation in society—and yet, on that day when he chose the path of the good, let us try, today, to recall that momentous decision; if we do, the intensity of our worldly craving shall be calmed,

and our hearts shall be anointed with the nectar of contentment. What he has given us through acquisition, we have gladly received; may we also become worthy to receive, with equal pride, what he has given us through renunciation.

He was a householder devoted to Brahma. Yet had he been merely a man of worldly affairs, he might have vastly multiplied, through ever-increasing accumulation, the portion of wealth he had recovered. But keeping watch over the expansion of his worldly affairs, he never deprived God's service of its due. His storehouse remained open for the spread of religion—how many orphaned families found shelter with him, how many impoverished men of talent he rescued from the grinding wheel of want, how many charitable works for the country's benefit he quietly supported without any show or ostentation. Yet in this very matter, he never once indulged his own children in luxurious living or in the cultivation of pride in wealth. Just as a righteous householder eats only after all his guests have been served, so too did he nourish his own family only with what remained after all the guests at his gate had been served in full. In this way, even while keeping us amid wealth and riches, he protected us from the hand of ostentation and the intoxication of indulgence; and if, because of this, the golden cage of fortune has been somewhat loosened before his children, if they have gained even the smallest right to roam freely in the open sky of the world of ideas, then surely, by their father's sacred grace, they have become more fortunate than many a man of great wealth.

Today we may proudly say to all: just as our father protected us, all this while, from poverty, so too he never confined us within the narrow bounds of wealth. The world lay open before us—the doors of rich and poor alike stood equally open to our comings and goings. Those whose circumstances in society were lower than our own were welcomed into our family in the spirit of true friendship, not as mere dependents. In the future we may fall from grace, but we, the brothers, have never known the dishonouring of poverty to be a custom of this household. That the unhesitating fellowship of common humanity, breaking through the narrowness of wealth, has come to us by his grace—for this we bow to him today.

To what degree he granted us freedom, none but ourselves can ever truly know! That very religion which he attained through anguished searching, which he preserved even amid the direst peril, to which he dedicated his entire life—that very religion he never made an instrument of tyranny even within his own household. His example stood before us; we were never deprived of his teaching—

but he never bound our intellect, our conduct, within the rule of any fixed dogma. He never wished to impose any particular doctrine upon us through habit or discipline—he threw open before us the path of freely seeking after God and religion for ourselves. Through this very freedom, he honoured us most highly—may we, worthy of that honour he bestowed, never stray from truth, never stray from righteousness, never stray from well-being. No family in this world can remain forever unchanged; no lineage can forever keep wealth and fame bound within itself; like the varied hues of the rainbow, the prosperity of this house must surely one day dissolve into the horizon; gradually, through various fissures, the seeds of division and estrangement will enter, and on some future day may shatter the very foundation of this family into a hundred fragments—but he who, through this family, gave living breath to the religious inquiry of an unconscious society; who, in the days of arrogant new English education, raised the infant Bengali language through many trials into vigorous adolescence; who set the nation upon the path of unveiling the treasury of its own ancient wealth; who, through his own austere and single-minded life, restored to a modern, wealth-obsessed society the ideal of the householder devoted to Brahma—he has joined this family to the whole family of humankind, has made its highest gain the gain of all mankind, has made its deepest loss the loss of all mankind; and the honour he has thus bestowed upon us—forgetting all other petty distinctions of rank and reputation—we shall remember today above all else, and with wholehearted devotion we shall bow ourselves before him, and in him, in whom he found his refuge, we shall behold one who stands above all wealth and rank, above all fame and glory.

O Ordainer of the universe, dispel today all our sorrow and weariness—through the veil that death has suddenly drawn aside, let us glimpse the semblance of Thy realm of immortality. In the world's ceaseless rise and fall, in the appearance and disappearance of wealth, honour, and life, reveal Thy *"ānandarūpam amṛtam"*—Thy form of bliss, which is immortality itself. How many mighty empires crumble into dust, how many powerful dominions set like the sun, how many world-renowned reputations sink into oblivion, how many treasures of Kubera vanish, leaving behind only the terror of their ruined heaps—yet, O Blissful One, amid all this succession of change, *"madhu vātā ṛtāyate"*—the winds blow sweetness; *"madhu kṣaranti sindhavaḥ"*—the seas flow with sweetness. Thy infinite sweetness knows no diminishing—let that universal sweetness of Thine, piercing through this fog of grief and sorrow, take possession of our hearts today.

Mādhvīr naḥ santv oṣadhīḥ, madhu naktam utoṣasaḥ, madhumat pārthivaṁ rajaḥ, madhu dyaur astu naḥ pitā, madhumān no vanaspatiḥ, madhumān astu sūryaḥ, mādhvīr gāvo bhavantu naḥ.

May the herbs be sweetness for us; may night and dawn be sweetness for us; may the dust of the earth be sweetness for us; may this very sky, which upholds the whole universe like a father, be sweetness for us; may the forest trees be sweetness for us; may the sun be sweetness; and may the cows yield sweetness for us.

1311

THE GREAT SOUL

Read at the memorial gathering (shraddha) for Maharshi Devendranath

We must confess that whatever those great souls who have established religious communities in this world wished to give us, we have not been able to receive. Nor is it merely that we have failed to receive it — perhaps, meaning to take one thing, we have taken and settled upon another instead. Perhaps, having embraced sectarianism in the very seat of religion, we have deemed ourselves fulfilled, and rest content.

One reason for this is that our capacity to receive is not the same in everyone. The path along which my mind moves with ease is obstructed for another's mind. We are tempted to deny this diversity of mind and to fashion for all mankind one single, unbending highway — for that would make our task easier — yet this attempt has never succeeded to this day. Nor have we truly understood that such success is, by its very nature, impossible. And so the path to which I am accustomed, the path which is easy for me, we imagine to be the only path for everyone; we cannot even conceive that for another it might prove impassable. It is for this reason that we regard the drawing of all men along one single path as the world's sole good. And when anyone raises an objection to this pulling and dragging, we are astonished; we suppose that the man is either wilfully abandoning his own good, or else harbours within him some baseness deserving of contempt.

But the diversity that God has bestowed upon the motive force within our minds, we shall never, by any device, be able to reduce to sameness. The goal of movement is one, but its paths are many. All rivers flow toward the sea, yet not all flow as one river. And that they do not — this is our good fortune.

God will in no wise permit all of us to walk along one fixed path. That we might close our eyes and walk with ease, one behind another — God will never make our way so simple as that. No individual, however great his power may be, can lay down, for all time, an easy fixed track for every human soul in the world to tread; the Ruler of the Universe can never suffer such a misfortune to befall mankind.

For this reason God has placed, at the deepest level of every human mind, a domain of individuality. There, at least, one man has no dominion over another. There is

kept, with the utmost care, the seed-cell of his immortality. It is there that he must achieve fulfilment by his own strength alone. Whoever, tempted by ease, wishes to surrender possession of this domain, loses everything, both the gain and its very root. It is such a man who, in place of religion takes the sect, in place of God takes the guru, in place of understanding takes the scripture — and sits with eyes closed. If he merely sat still we might yet survive; but in his effort to swell the ranks of his party, he creates in the world much failure and much strife.

This is why I said that great souls establish religious communities, and we, out of what they establish, take the community only, and not the religion itself. For, by the ordinance of the Creator, the thing called religion must be attained only through one's own free and independent effort; there is no way to beg it comfortably from another's hand. No true and abiding substance can we obtain merely by stretching out our hand and asking of another. Wherever we have gone begging by the easy road, there we have been cheated. What we have gained in that manner has not filled the belly of the soul, though the soul's caste has been lost in the getting.

How then are we to regard this matter of religious communities? We must understand it thus: that it is not the water which quenches thirst, but only the vessel in which the water is held. He whose thirst is real wanders in distress in search of that water, and, finding suitable occasion, quenches his thirst even by cupping it in his hands. But he who has no thirst knows the vessel alone to be of the greatest worth. That is why no one troubles to know where the water may lie spilled; it is over the vessel that fierce quarrels arise in the world. Then that very religion which had come to loosen the noose of worldly attachment sits and weaves in the world a subtler net of a newer worldliness; and that net is hard indeed to cut.

The founders of religious communities, each according to his own attainment, fashion for us a vessel — be it of clay or of gold. If we think that the fashioning of that vessel is the greatest testimony of their greatness, then that is our error. For however dear and however convenient the vessel may be to us, it can never be equally dear and equally convenient to all the world. Blinded by the infatuation of devotion, intoxicated with the pride of party, we must not forget this. Everyone knows the fable: the fox invited the stork to dinner, serving the soup upon a flat dish, and the stork, with her long beak, could not eat of it. Afterward, when the

stork in her turn invited the fox, serving the soup in a narrow-necked jar, the fox had to return with hunger unappeased. In just such a way, we cannot conceive of any universal religious community whose doctrines and observances could satisfy the intellect, taste, and need of all mankind alike.

Therefore, to view the religious teachers of the world merely from the standpoint of their establishing doctrinal creeds and formal communities is to view them in a diminished light. Only those bent on party spirit can see them thus, and by such seeing only party spirit itself is nourished and enlarged. There must surely be, in them, something that can be seen and by which all men, in every land and every age, may be summoned — something that is not the lamp alone, but the light itself.

What is that thing? It is what they themselves *attained* — not what they *fashioned*. What they attained was not their own creation; what they fashioned was their own composition.

Today we have all gathered here in his memory; and it is my earnest plea that we do not look upon him too from the standpoint of any single party. Those who belong to a sect, in their eagerness to hold the party's banner highest of all, may inadvertently diminish even the guru before it — this fear can never quite be banished from the mind. At least, on this day, let us not impose our own narrowness upon him.

Doubtless, in the field of action, the particular traits of his nature revealed themselves in many forms. In his language, in his conduct, in his deeds, he expressed himself before us in his own distinctive manner — and there is no doubt that these natural particularities are of value when we come to study the story of his life. Such study satisfies our curiosity regarding his inherited disposition, his education, and all the facts concerning the influence of his country and his age upon him. But is it not something else that his life reveals to us, veiled behind all these particular aspects? Is light meant to reveal the lamp, or is the lamp meant to spread the light abroad? If today our whole gaze does not turn towards that which he himself beheld and showed to us, if our vision remains fixed in any measure upon his own particularities alone, then we shall have dishonoured the guru.

One day the Maharshi awoke in the very midst of a life of full enjoyment, and beheld darkness in all the lights of that mansion of pleasure. On that day, as all know, he set out with a thirsting heart along an arduous path in search of the water

that would quench his thirst. He did not rest until he had reached that sacred place whence flows the fountain of immortal nectar that has preserved the whole universe. And the water of that holy fount he brought back for us too, filled in a vessel. This vessel may break tomorrow or the day after; the religious community he raised up may not endure in its present form — but that he himself went to the very brink of that fountain of nectar and filled his own life with it, this is the gain of each one of us. This gain shall not be destroyed, shall not come to an end.

I have said before that we shall never receive God through the hand of another. We must go to Him ourselves; we must attain Him ourselves. If it prove difficult, so much the better; if it be delayed, there is no harm in that. By listening to the words of others, by receiving instruction, by performing the observances prescribed by society, we imagine that we have attained fulfilment — but that is merely the water of a pitcher, not the fountain itself. It grows stale, it runs dry; our whole life is not consecrated by it, and with it we go on, like worldly men, indulging in pride and factional strife.

Such pitcher-water will not suffice us; each of us must go to that fountain itself. Our own utter and personal bond with God we must ourselves acknowledge, standing before His very presence. When the emperor summons me to his court, can I discharge my duty by sending a deputy in my stead? Since God has called each one of us, unless we answer that call and surrender ourselves wholly and completely into His presence, there can be no fulfilment for us in any wise.

This much we can learn from the lives of great souls. When we see that they have suddenly abandoned all their occupations and rushed forth in haste, then we understand that the call has indeed come — we ourselves have not heard it, but they have heard it. Then, for a moment, we too withdraw our minds from the clamour on every side, and we too stand still, straining our ears. Thus, from the lives of great souls, we come to know clearly, for the first time, how profoundly true is the call of the Supreme Soul to the individual soul. This very knowing is itself a gain.

Then, on another day, we see them thus: calm in joy and sorrow, unshaken amid temptation, steadfast in their vow of righteousness. We see that many a storm passes over their heads, yet their helm remains true. The prospect of total ruin has arisen before them like a terrible spectre, yet they have accepted it with ease and

remained unmoved upon the path of justice. Kinsmen and friends forsake them, yet they bear all such separations with a serene heart — and it is then that we understand what we ourselves have not attained, and what they have attained. What peace, what friend, what treasure is theirs! Then we understand what it is that we too, ultimately, must have — the one gain by which all our seeking shall be stilled.

Thus, in the lives of great souls, we first see by what attraction they abandoned all things and set forth; afterward we see by what gain all their renunciation was made fruitful. In this respect, the very awakening of our own minds is our gain. For without such an awakening, no gain whatsoever can be accomplished.

But then, if we ponder where the treasure to be gained may be found, and how we shall attain it, then we must ask this very question — whither did they go, and how did they attain it?

In the life of the Maharshi we find an answer to this question. We see that he abandoned all his inherited beliefs, all his former refuges, and stepped forth entirely empty-handed. The prevailing customs of society did not hold him fast; scripture offered him no shelter. His own restless yearning alone showed him the way. That path was the deep, secret path of his own nature. Forsaking every other road, he had to discover that path for himself. Had he lacked the patience and courage to make such a discovery, he too might have walked in the way of the multitude, and, content with mere piety in place of true religion, might have rested satisfied — but within him had arisen the cry of "I must have it, or nothing," and therefore he had to seek out his own path by himself. Whatever sorrow, whatever reproach it entailed, all of it he had to accept — there was no escaping this.

For this is precisely what God desires. Though He is the God of the whole universe, He chooses to be known to each of us in a wholly unique and personal relation — and for this reason He has, within each of us, forever guarded an indestructible individuality against assault from every side. It is within this most pure, solitary, and secluded individuality alone that the place of our union with Him is fixed. When we ourselves, by our own effort, open that door, and utterly surrender to Him our claim upon that ultimate individuality — when we can offer up to Him that which, in all the universe, is mine and no other's — then nothing more shall remain to us, and then alone shall He be attained.

This door of our individuality — each has its own particular key. The key of one man will not open the door of another. Those in this world who have never rested until they attained God have all, obeying the guidance of their own restless yearning, sought out and found, as best they could, their own key. Only those who, in indolence, rely wholly upon others, come to a halt at some doctrine, some scripture, or some religious community, and there, tossed about upon its surface, raise their clamour, never reaching their final destination.

If our strength should prove feeble, if our longing should prove not to be genuine, then we know not when at last we shall arrive. But whenever we sit down to consider the lives of great souls, let us hold that very goal before us; let their memory show us the light upon the further shore, and let us never, on any day, raise it up as the torch of sectarian conquest. Their example should redeem us from bondage, should raise us above servitude to others, should establish us upon the true path through our own true strength and true endeavour; it should not give us alms, but the means of search — not shelter, but fearlessness — it should not bid us follow, but encourage us to advance. In a word, the great soul does not draw us towards his own creation, but calls us towards God.

Today, let us still our minds, let us calm them. That which is daily built and daily broken, over which there is no end to argument, dispute, hatred and strife — wherein lies all the disagreement of men's intellects, tastes, and habits — let us, in the presence of death, see all of this today diminished and small. Let us today, with unclouded heart, apprehend only that power of our soul which God has bestowed upon us as the eternal provision for our life and death; that word of His which forever resounds within our innermost being amid our joys and sorrows, our risings and fallings, our victories and defeats; that bond of His which, secretly, eternally, and utterly, is mine alone.

Let us today fix our tranquil gaze upon that alone in which all the striving of a great soul finds its fulfilment and completion — that supreme consummation in which all the fragmentariness of deeds, all the frailty of endeavours, all the incompleteness of expression, attain their perfect wholeness. Reminding especially the people of every sect of this truth, let us offer, with humble hearts, our reverence to that great soul now departed to the other world; let us, with folded hands, gaze above the summit of his memory upon the majesty of that pole-star — the eternal light which,

through the difficult ocean-path of prosperity and adversity, has, after the long day's end, brought his life safe to the shore of its final repose.

Magh, 1313