

ESSAY

ACTION AT THE WILL OF THE MASTER

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Let but a breath of the monsoon wind stir, and straightway the flood overflows our lane and reaches the high road; the wayfarer's shoes become as indispensable as an umbrella; and it may be said that the creatures of this amphibious lane are less fit for living than are the creatures of the water itself. From childhood I have watched this spectacle, year after year, from our verandah, until my hair has turned white.

Nearly sixty years have passed since then. In those days steam was the chief vehicle of the modern age; now electricity smiles at it with a sidelong glance. Then the atomic theory had barely reached the unseen; now it has become the inevitable. Meanwhile man, like the ant on the eve of its death, has spread wings in the sky; the day is not far when heirs will go to court over the division of the very sky, and solicitors are already counting the days. In a single night the people of China clipped off their ancient pigtail and swept it away; and Japan took such a leap across the sea of ages that fifty years overtook five hundred. But as for the monsoon's floodwaters, our street's hospitality toward them remains exactly what it was. When not even the letter K of "Congress" had been laid down, the wives of travellers on this road already sang the rainy-season song—

After how long, walking on foot,
Will you cross the ocean of sorrow?

And today, when the ripe fruit of Home Rule dangles almost within reach of our moustaches, still the same song is sung—in the raga Meghmalla, in the tala Jhaptal.

Since childhood I have watched this state of affairs, so the matter comes to me as nothing unexpected. And what is not unexpected, no one troubles to think about. Neither did I think of it; I merely endured it. But just as, in a letter, some remark that would ordinarily escape the eye leaps out at once when a line is drawn beneath it, so too, seeing a double line drawn beneath the perpetual waterlogging of our street, a shock ran through me—not merely in the mind but in the very wheels of our

carriage—again and again. The rains had come down, and with them the repair of the tram-line had also begun. Whatever has a beginning, says the law of cause and effect, must have an end; but of the tramway-men's law of cause and effect I see no end at all. So this time, when along with the digging of the line I saw, on Chitpur Road, the flood of water contending with the flood of humanity, my whole being grew heavy with feeling, and after a long while I began to ponder deeply: why do we endure this?

That it is not necessary to endure it, and that not enduring it would in fact be better, one may perceive the moment one sets foot in the Chowringhee quarter. It is the same city, the same municipality; only the difference is this—that what we tolerate, they do not. If fifteen annas of the cost of Chowringhee road belonged to the tramway alone, and if the digging up of the road for line-repairs proceeded with such sweet, leisurely gait, then the Tramway Company's directors would not go through their days eating and their nights sleeping in peace.

Our meek and good-natured citizen says, "What are you saying! Just because it causes us a little inconvenience, should the tram-line not be repaired?"

"Repaired it will be, no doubt! But not with such a marvellously placid temper, and not for so long a term."

The meek and good-natured citizen says, "Is that even possible?"

It is precisely because good, meek people have no faith that things could be better than they are that their breasts are perpetually awash in tears, and their very doorsteps are in much the same condition.

In this way we smear sorrow over our whole being, and let it roll and spread around us on every side like tar from a broken barrel.

The matter sounds trivial to hear, but it is not trivial in truth. Nowhere have we ever fully understood that we possess any sovereignty of our own. I have read in a book of a fish that lived in a glass bowl; after knocking its head many times, it finally understood that the glass was not water. Afterward it was released into a great lake, yet even then it did not have the courage to understand that the water was not glass; and so it went on circling within that same small space. That fear of striking one's head is bred into our very bones as well; and so, even where one might swim freely, the mind does not venture there. Abhimanyu, in his very mother's womb, learned the art of entering the battle-array but not the art of coming out of it; and so he was beaten to death on every side by the seven great warriors. We too, even before birth, learned only the art of being bound, never the art of untying the knot; and thereafter, from the very beginning of intellect down to the very act of walking, we have wound ourselves round and round in coils—and it is from this that, in this world, we have been beaten and are dying at the hands of every champion, even down to the meanest foot-soldier. We are so accustomed to obeying, without question, man, scripture, sign, and boundary-line, one after another, that even when our own sovereignty stands bodily before our eyes, in no way can we be brought to recognize it—no, not even if we put on English spectacles.

The greatest truth for mankind is this: that the right to sovereignty is itself the right of being human. In whatever land this truth has been buried under manifold doctrines, manifold sayings, manifold codes of law; in whatever land men, for fear that judgment might err by so much as a hair, bind themselves hand and foot with custom, so that if they should walk they might fall too far astray, and so break their own path with their own hands—in that land, in the name of religion, men are taught to hold themselves in boundless disrespect, and in that land the greatest factory ever opened is the factory for the manufacture of slaves.

Our own men in authority, too, speak in this very tone, with scriptural solemnity: "You will err, you are not capable, therefore sovereignty cannot be entrusted to your hands."

Be that as it may, this echo of Manu and Parashara sounds most discordant in an English throat; and so the answer we give them is, in fact, spoken in their own natural tone. We say: to err is not so great a calamity as the lack of self-sovereignty. Only where there is freedom to err can there be freedom to attain truth. If, in the hope of being flawless and faultless, one must become inert and lifeless beyond all correction, then better, far better, that we should simply err.

We have more to say. We may also remind those in authority that today you drive the motor-car of self-rule, but once, before daybreak, when the journey began in a bullock-cart, the shriek of its two wheels through ditch and hollow did not sound exactly like a shout of triumph. Parliament itself has always come lurching, now to the right, now to the left, cutting from one precedent's line into another's, jolted violently the whole way; even at its very origin it did not find a paved road laid down by a steamroller. Through how much haggling, brawling, faction, injustice, and disorder has it come, swaying from side to side! Now the king, now the church, now the landed gentry, now even the wine-merchant, has had its interest served. There was a time when members attended Parliament only for fear of fines and punishment. And as for its faults—one could give a long list of them, beginning with the affair of Ireland and America in ages past, and coming down to our own day with the Boer War and the Dardanelles and Mesopotamia; the ledger of India's partition, too, is no small one—but of that there is no use speaking now. The mischiefs that the demon of Mammon works in the political economy of America are no trifling matter. In the injustice of military ascendancy that was exposed in the French political system on the occasion of the persecution of Dreyfus, one can plainly see the hand of the enemy's inner weakness. Yet, despite all this, today no man doubts, even in the slightest, that it is through the very speed of self-rule's ceaseless motion that man cuts through his errors by passing through them, and that even after breaking his neck in the pit of injustice, he pushes his way up again by sheer struggle. For this reason it is better to let a man go hungry while he strives freely to earn his bread than to bind his hands behind his back and feed sweetened rice into his mouth by force.

There is yet a greater thing we have to say—it is this, that self-rule in the political sphere does not merely engender good administration or a sense of responsibility; it enlarges the very compass of the human mind. Those whose minds are confined to the village community or to small social divisions—only when they gain the right of political sovereignty do they get the opportunity to view mankind within a larger circumference. For want of this opportunity, every man remains diminished as a man. In this condition, when he does not spread his own life over the vast field of humanity's role, then his thought, his strength, his hope and trust, all become small. This dwarfing of man's soul is a far greater calamity than the loss of his life. "In the vast alone is joy; there is no joy in the small." Therefore, accepting all the risk of error and blunder, we still demand self-sovereignty. We shall go on falling as we walk—but for pity's sake, keep your eyes fixed only upon our falling, and do not therefore obstruct our walking!

This is the true answer. If some stubborn, headstrong man gives this answer and thereby vexes those in authority, then from that quarter he may be interned—but from this quarter, he wins applause. Yet if we present this very same answer to the elders of our own society, if we say, "You tell us the age is degenerate, our intelligence is poor, that in free judgment we err, in free conduct we sin, and therefore our bowed heads are made to set aside the brain and hold the scripture supreme—but so great an insult we will not accept"—then the elders of the meeting-hall turn red-eyed with fury, and society at once passes its sentence of internment. Those who flap their wings to fly in the political sky are the very ones who bind their own two feet fast in iron fetters upon the perch of society.

The truth of the matter is this: the same rudder that steers the boat to the right steers it also to the left. There is one central truth; whoever can grasp it becomes true both in society and in the affairs of the state. It is upon possession of this very central truth that the difference between Chitpur and Chowringhee rests. Chitpur has decided, once for all, that everything lies in the hands of the one above; and so it has emptied its own hands and lain flat upon its back. Chowringhee says: if it were truly so, that we have no hand in anything, then we would not have these two hands at all. Because Chowringhee believes there is an unbroken connection between the

hand of the one above and our own hands, it has taken the world into its grip; and because Chitpur does not believe this, it has let the world slip from its grasp, and the pupils of its two eyes have rolled back until it lies there sightless as Shiva in trance.

To regard any of our home-made petty rules as the greatest of all, one must shut one's eyes. Open the eyes, and one sees that there runs through the universe, from end to end, one vast and single law. To make this law, through one's own endeavour, one's own possession—that is the gaining of strength, the gaining of prosperity, the gaining of deliverance from sorrow—this is the settled conviction that forms the firm foundation of present-day European civilization. The success of the individual lies not in any special dispensation but in the dispensation of the universe—it is by knowing this firmly that Europe has won so great a liberation in the field of power.

We, however, turn both palms upward, heave a long sigh, and say: "As the master wills, so is the deed." That master—be he the ancestral father of the household, or the police inspector, or the priest at the shrine, or the compiler of the scriptures, or Shitala, Manasa, Olabibi, Dakshinray, Shani, Mangal, Rahu, Ketu—under a thousand such names we take our own strength, break it into a thousand fragments, and scatter it to the winds.

The college-educated reader will say—we do not believe in any of this. We take the vaccine against smallpox; when cholera comes we arrange for injections of saline water; indeed, we no longer set up the goddess of the plague-bearing host, malaria—we count her merely a worm among worms, and yet, along with all this, we still hang a charm stuffed with mystic formula upon our well-fed bellies.

Whether in words we believe or disbelieve a thing makes no difference; but the poison of that superstitious belief has rotted the inside of our minds. The foundation of this mental cowardice is a boundless, uncertain fear pervading the whole universe. It is precisely because we do not believe in the one undivided cosmic power manifest within the one undivided cosmic law that we dismiss our reason in

advance, out of a thousand fanciful fears. Fear only ever says: who knows, why take the risk? That is simply what fear is. Even among our rulers we observe that the moment fear creeps in through some crack in the governance of the realm, they forget their own Western creed—the creed that their strength rests upon the firm foundation of settled law—and swing the axe with eyes shut, upon the very law that is their strength's fixed reliance. Then trust in the preservation of justice gives way; they come to value the preservation of prestige above it—and, staking their wager against Providence, they imagine that by forcibly despatching the people's tears to the Andamans, they can make the smoke of hell itself seem sweet. This, surely, is nothing but distrust of the universal law, and reliance upon one's own particular expedient. At its root lies some petty fear, or some petty greed, or some very petty cunning to make one's task easy. We too, in the panic of a formless fear, are ready to sacrifice our very humanity. In our distraction we have taken to acclaiming, with folded hands, whatever exists and whatever does not exist, indiscriminately. Thus we study biology or physical science, and pass examinations in the history of political systems, yet we cannot shake from our minds that seed-mantra, "As the master wills, so is the deed." And so, though in our own age the labour of many centuries has, by chance, been compressed into the work of one lifetime, still the labour that belonged to our former age keeps pushing forward, insisting on becoming the labour of this one alone. From somewhere, out of nowhere, some new master suddenly springs up. The sole reason is this: that the very people about whom the talk of centuries is going forward still rise and sit, eat and marry and mount the funeral pyre, and stretch out their hands for the offering-cake in the world to come, all by the will of some master; as to what is sin and what is virtue, which room one may enter without having first to spit out the water from one's hookah, in a well of how many cubits' circumference one may bathe, what merit there is in a Brahmin confectioner's puri as against a baker's bread, what merit there is in liquor distilled by an untouchable as against water touched by his hand—all such questions they have settled once for all, drawing on the will of the master. If I say that the water fetched in a filthy pitcher, dipped by unclean hands into a stagnant pool, is unfit to drink, while the water brought by Pani Mia through a filter is pure and wholesome, the answer I shall hear is: that is a mere matter of petty logic, but it is not the master's will. And if I say, then let the master's will go hang—the invitation is cancelled. Not only is hospitality to guests annulled, even the last rites are suspended. Those whose right even to so simple a thing as eating and drinking is

checked at every step by so merciless a tyranny, and who yet regard that very tyranny as their own welfare—why do they feel no shame in claiming, in the affairs of the state, an unrestricted right?

When the capital of one's own strength is not put to use for the business of the common people, then in every matter man passes his days, fearful, with hand outstretched, before the gods, before the planets, before strangers. If this attitude has ever found vivid and precise expression anywhere, it is in the old Mangal-Kavyas of Bengal. Such was the loftiness of merchant Chand's spirit that he would in no wise consent to acknowledge as a deity one whom he held to be base and low; yet, after untold suffering, he was forced to bow before that very deity's power. Now this power has no connection whatever with knowledge or with the law of righteousness. The more wilful and capricious the one to be worshipped, the more terrible he is, and the more abject the flattery paid to him. This conception of universal sovereignty was, in those days, bound up with the conception of political sovereignty as well. One finds report of this in the very preface to Kavikankan's poem. There is no law, no justice; might is right, whoever holds the country holds it by force; there is no lawful way of resisting the tyranny of the strong; the weak have only one recourse—flattery, bribery, and, in the end, flight. As in the imagining of the divine character, so in society, so likewise in the political order.

And yet, once, in the Upanishads, this was said of the Divine ordinance: *yathātathyato'rthān vyadadhāc chāshvatībhyaḥ samābhyaḥ*—that is, His ordinance is exact and true, it is not haphazard, and that ordinance is for eternal time. It is ordained from eternity and for eternity; it is not some fresh whim arising moment by moment. Therefore this eternal ordinance we may each of us, through knowledge, comprehend, and through action, make our own. The more we attain it, the more we shall go on overcoming ever-new obstacles. For an ordinance in which there is eternity can nowhere come to a final halt; obstacles it shall surely overcome. To know this eternal and exact ordinance in its exactness is science. It is by the strength of that science that so vast a confidence has arisen in the mind of Europe that she declares: I shall banish malaria, I shall let no disease survive; want born of ignorance, want born of poverty, shall be driven from human habitation; whoever is

born into the house of man shall be healthy and strong in body and mind; and in the political order, the harmony between individual liberty and the welfare of all shall become complete.

In the spiritual sense, India once declared: bondage lies in ignorance, liberation in knowledge; our deliverance lies only in the attainment of Truth. What is falsehood? To know oneself as utterly separate—that is falsehood. To know the union of the soul with all beings, and thereby to know one's spiritual bond with the Supreme Soul—that is to know Truth. What a supremely wondrous thing it is to be able to bring so vast a truth into the mind, we today can scarcely even comprehend.

Meanwhile, in the material sphere, the very liberation that Europe is striving to attain rests upon this selfsame principle. Here too we find: bondage lies in ignorance, liberation in the attainment of truth. That scientific truth is carrying the mind of man from separateness into universality, and along that path it is uniting man's particular power with the power of the universe.

In India, gradually, the age of the rishis—that is, the age of the householder-ascetics—passed away; gradually came the age of the Buddhist monk. The great truth that India had attained, it thereby cut off from the path of life's daily practice. It declared: only by becoming a renunciate does the striving for liberation become possible at all. As a result, in this country, a kind of compromise was struck between knowledge and ignorance; as with a division of estates, the two came to have separate domains, and a wall rose up between them. And so in society, however much narrowness, however much grossness, however much sheer stupidity might prevail in matters of religion, of conduct, of custom, of judgment, there was no protest against it from the side of the highest truth—indeed, there was positive endorsement. Sitting beneath a tree, the sage declares: "That man who has seen himself in all beings, and all beings in himself, has seen the Truth"—and straightway the worldly man, melting with devotion, fills the sage's begging-bowl. And meanwhile that same worldly man, sitting on his own veranda, declares: "That fellow who does not keep himself as separate as possible from all beings—may his

washerman and barber be shut out from him"; and the sage comes, takes the dust of that man's feet upon his own head, and blesses him, saying, "My son, may you live long." It is for this very reason that separateness and inertia have gone on increasing, step by step, in the domain of practical life in this country, with nothing anywhere to check them. It is for this very reason that, for hundreds and hundreds of years, we have suffered such disgrace, such defeat, in the domain of practical affairs.

In Europe it is exactly the reverse. Europe's field for the pursuit of truth is not knowledge alone, but conduct. There, whatever fault is seen in the state or in society, all unite, by the light of this truth, to examine it; all unite, by the help of this truth, to set it right. And so that truth, whatever power, whatever liberation it offers, belongs by right to all mankind; it gives hope to all men, courage to all men—its unfolding is not hidden away in the fog of tantric mystery, but grows, in the open light, before the eyes of all, and raises up all men together.

Now, this disgrace that we have endured for hundreds and hundreds of years in the field of worldly action has appeared to us in the form of political subjection. Where the pain is, there the hand goes. It is for this very reason that our whole mind has turned toward the political system of that European nation which gained mastery over us. Forgetting all else, we say only this one thing: that our will must be brought into union with India's system of governance—it should not be that whatever rule is imposed from above, at whatever whim, we accept it without any will of our own. To load sovereignty onto our own shoulders makes it a burden; let it instead be set upon some such wheeled carriage as we too can push forward with our own hands.

Today this same prayer has arisen in every land upon this earth: that man shall win his freedom from the wholly one-sided rule of the master who stands outside him. That we too should join in this prayer is only in keeping with the spirit of the age—had we not done so, had we said that in political affairs we shall forever remain mere flatterers of the master, that would indeed have been a matter of the utmost shame

for us. That even through a single crack, truth is showing itself to us—this too is a good omen.

It is because truth has shown itself that I say, with such force, today: that pride which drives our strength forward, I call noble; but that pride which seeks, from behind, to bind us fast to the stake of immobility, as one binds the sacrificial goat—that I call accursed! With this same pride we turn our face outward and say: we demand a seat in the sovereign assembly of the political order—and then, with that very same pride, we turn our face homeward and shout: "Beware! In matters of religion, in matters of society, even in personal conduct, not one step shall be taken without the master's command"—this, indeed, is what we call the revival of Hinduism. From the side of national pride comes the command upon us: let one eye of ours be awake, and the other eye asleep. Such a command is hard indeed to obey.

When, in Providence's chastisement, the rod fell upon our backs, national pride started up in a fury and cried, "Uproot that bamboo-rod!" It forgets that though the rod be uprooted, the bamboo-grove remains. The fault lies neither in the rod nor in the bamboo, but in ourselves. The fault is this: that in the place of Truth we set up the master; to revere the blinker in place of the eye is our inveterate habit. So long as this continues, some bamboo-rod or other, cut from some thicket, shall remain immortal for our chastisement.

There was a time when the rule of theological authority was strong in every department of society in Europe too. It was only after cutting through that entangling net and coming out into the open that the common people there could take truly long strides upon the path of self-rule. The dual-natured skill of the Englishman was a great advantage to him in this. For the chief seat of European theocracy was Rome; and for insular England, separated by the sea, it was not so hard to deny Rome's full authority. I do not say that England today shows no trace at all of what is meant by theocracy. But her condition is like that of the widowed mistress of a great household. Those before whom she once ruled with a rod of iron now, whether justly or not, must be humoured by her in turn; she has her lodging in

the side-chamber, and a small allowance is set aside for her keep. The children of this generation still bow to the old woman weekly, after the ancient custom, but they no longer obey her. Had this mistress's old authority remained as before, not one of the sons and daughters could dare utter a word today.

England has long since escaped the rule of this old woman, but Spain has not yet escaped it fully. There was a day when a mighty wind filled Spain's sails; on that day she planted her flag of victory on every shore and inlet of the earth. But that old woman sat firmly upon her rudder, and so today Spain has fallen utterly behind. She made so great a leap at the very first stride, and yet, only a little while after, she could no longer keep pace—why? Because the old woman had always ridden upon her shoulders. The first signs of Spain's exhaustion had shown themselves long before, on the very day her naval war with England's fleet, under King Philip, began. On that day it suddenly came to light that Spain's faith in religion was, like her ancient custom, unyielding—and her science of naval warfare was exactly the same. England's warships had well understood and adapted themselves to the changeable laws of wind and water; but Spain's warships could not depart from their own fixed and rigid rule. Whatever the skill of a man, whatever his merit, he could rise to command an English warship; but on Spain's fighting vessels, none but the nobly born had any right to the office of captain.

Today, in whatever land of Europe, great or small, the common people have been able to lift up their heads, everywhere the crooked authority of theocracy has grown slack, and man has learned to respect himself. In the mass-society where this self-respect does not exist—as in Russia—there society becomes, like a lawless field, overrun with the thorn-bushes of a thousand petty tyrannies. There, from the constable of today to the priest of yesterday, every one twists the ear of humanity and exacts an unjust toll.

It must be remembered that religion and theocracy are not the same thing. They are like fire and ash. When religion is made subordinate to theocracy, it begins to pile sand upon the flowing river's water. Then the current no longer flows; the desert

stretches out, bare and desolate. And moreover, when man puffs up his chest over this very rigidity, then—as the saying goes—the boil bursts upon the very swelling.

Religion says: if you do not respect man, then neither the one who insults nor the one insulted attains any good. But theocracy says: if you do not observe, down to the last flawless detail, the elaborate code of rules for disrespecting man without mercy, you shall fall from religion. Religion says: whoever inflicts needless suffering upon a living creature destroys his own soul. But theocracy says: however unbearable the suffering, the parents who, on some particular ceremonial day, deny food and water to the mouth of their widowed daughter, are nurturing righteousness. Religion says: by repentance and by works of goodness, sin is washed away, within and without. But theocracy says: by taking a special bath on the day of an eclipse, not only one's own sins but those of fourteen generations of ancestors are redeemed. Religion says: cross seas and mountains, and behold the world—therein lies the unfolding of the mind. Theocracy says: if you must cross the ocean, you shall first have to write out, at very great length, a deed of atonement. Religion says: whatever man is truly a man is to be honoured, into whatsoever house he may be born. Theocracy says: whatever man is a Brahmin is worthy to have his feet placed upon one's head, however base and worthless he otherwise may be. In other words, religion chants the mantra of liberation, and theocracy the mantra of servitude.

I know of a day when one king went to Calcutta to call upon another king. The host was a man educated at college, a man of sound learning. Just as the guest was about to step up into his carriage, the host caught hold of the guest's garment and pulled him back, saying, "Sir, the betel-leaf is still in your mouth!" The owner of the carriage, under compulsion, spat out the betel from his mouth, because his coachman was a Muslim. One has not even the right to ask the question: "Whoever the coachman may be, why must the betel be spat out?" Though neither religious sense nor practical reason found the least obstruction anywhere in it, yet the very freedom to sit comfortably in one's carriage and chew betel at ease—a freedom which the people of that land are ready to abandon without a moment's hesitation—the people of that land have accorded to freedom itself the last rites of extinction. And

yet I observe that those who strike the axe at the root are the very ones eager to pour water upon the topmost branches.

There is a certain beauty in unswerving devotion. Certain foreigners, coming to this country, expound upon that beauty. They view it from the outside only, in just the way an artist views the picturesque quality of an old, crumbling house, without inquiring into its fitness for habitation. During the bathing festival, coming from Barisal to Calcutta, I have seen pilgrims bound for the Ganges bath, the greater part of them women. At every landing of the steamer, at every railway station, the limit of their suffering and humiliation knew no bound. Viewed from outside, there is a certain beauty in this eager, patient endurance. But the Inner Witness of our country has not accepted the beauty of this blind devotion. He gave no reward—only punishment. Sorrow only increased. These women, who, within the fence of vows and austerities, have raised sons to manhood, bow their heads before every object of this world, and grope their way, bowing, before every shadow of the world to come. To dig obstacles to their own work into every bend of the road is their labour, and to raise the hindrance to their own progress sky-high, this they call progress. That man should endure suffering for the sake of truth—that is beautiful. But if man endures the least suffering at the hands of blind judgment or lame power, that is ugly. For the greatest gift that Providence has given us—the courage of self-sacrifice—such suffering as this is nothing but its reckless squandering. Today its account is being settled against us—and the ledger of that debt runs very heavy. I have seen with my own eyes: along the very path by which thousands upon thousands of men and women went, in quest of merit, to bathe, right there, at its very edge, lying on the ground, a foreign patient died; and because no one knew what caste he belonged to, no one touched him. This, surely, is the very mark of bankruptcy in the ledger of debt. This suffering-enduring devotion of those seeking merit is beautiful to look upon, but its loss is total ruin. The very blindness that drives men to bathe in water for the sake of merit is the same blindness that restrains them from tending an unknown dying man. Ekalavya cut off his own thumb for the most merciless Dronacharya; but by that blind devotion he deprived his whole family, for the rest of his life, of the fruit of his own austerities. This utterly barren fruitlessness of foolish devotion—Providence does not honour it, for it is an insult to His own gift. It has been seen at the shrine of Gaya that a rich woman, pouring out heap upon

heap of money, worshipped the feet of a priest who possessed neither learning nor character. At that moment, her overflowing devotion seems beautiful in the sentimental eye; but has this unwavering devotion, this boundless generosity, carried that woman even one step forward on the path of true compassion? The answer to this is: still, at least, she is spending the money; had she not held the priest to be sacred, she would not have spent the money at all, or would have spent it upon herself. That is true—but she would have gained one great thing thereby: that she would not have deceived herself into calling either the not-spending, or the spending-upon-herself, "religion"—her mind would have remained free from this bondage of delusion. It is for want of this very freedom of mind that the strength of this country cannot come forth into the open. For he who has been trained to walk with his eyes shut, his feet tremble when he tries to walk with his eyes open; he who, like a loyal slave, has learned only to give his life for his master, finds it beyond his power, once he becomes his own master, to give his life freely for the sake of justice and righteousness.

It is for this very reason that in our villages today, food, water, health, education, joy—all are at their lowest ebb. Believing that without awakening the people's own strength there can be no deliverance for the villager, I attempted to awaken, in one particular locality, the strength of a people to work out their own welfare with their own hands. One day a fire broke out in that locality; there was not a drop of water anywhere near; the people of the place stood about crying "Alas! Alas!" I said to them: "If you will dig a well in your locality with your own labour, I will bear the cost of lining it with brick." They thought: the merit of it will go to that clever fellow, while we shall have to supply the labour—this is a trick. The well was never dug; the water-shortage remained; and the fire was left a standing invitation, ever renewed.

This is the cause of this unshakable misery: whatever public works have been done in the village have, up to now, been brought about through the temptation of merit alone. And so the whole burden of supplying every human want is laid either upon Providence, or upon some outsider. If no aspirant for merit happens to be at hand, these people, though they should die of thirst, will not dig so much as a single spadeful of earth with their own hands. For they have not yet descended from the

lap of that same old woman who has, from outside, bound and settled for them their caste, their creed, their religion, their conduct, their good and their evil, their eating and their sleeping—everything. I cannot blame them, for the old woman has drugged their very minds with opium and put them to sleep. But it is astonishing to see that the educated youth of our present day, even the young students in our colleges, sing the praises of this rule of the old woman! It fills them with pride to see India seated upon the lap of the eternal nurse; they say, that is a very high place, one's foot never touches the ground from up there; they say, seated upon that very lap, it will be a fine and glorious thing to take up the sceptre of self-rule in one's own hand.

And yet I see plainly: sorrow upon sorrow, famine upon famine; every messenger that Death's kingdom possesses has come and taken up lodging in our very homes. Just as we have no license to raise a weapon even when a tiger charges at us from the forest, so too, when these calamities leap and set their teeth into our very throats, I find that society has no licence for a gun. The weapon needed to drive these away is the weapon of knowledge, the weapon of reasoned judgment. Those whose devotion to the rule of the old woman is unshakable say: "Is that weapon then wholly denied to us? We too shall learn science, and use it as far as we can." To say the weapon is wholly denied would be an exaggeration; but the law governing the licensing of that weapon is terribly strict. Even while permitting its use, the whole emphasis, sixteen annas' worth, is on withholding it as far as possible. The bounds of its use are so narrow that the slightest deviation, this way or that, brings down such fierce boxing of the ears, that the whole tribe of gurus and priests, charms and amulets, learned verse and womanly incantation, keep one walking so fearfully and so cautiously, that if a real robber should come, one would find oneself in far worse straits with this unfamiliar gun than with the robber himself.

Be that as it may—since the fetter upon the foot has been blessed with the prayer that it may last forever, the kindly soul is bound also to say this: be ready to be carried upon men's shoulders! If the mending and strengthening of every kind of caste-fence and custom-fence throughout the realm is to be called our revival; if to hem in the field of life in this fashion, and to narrow the field of reason, is to be

counted our glory—then, along with all this, one must also say: form yourselves into a band to nurse these invalids through both their meals, day and night! But no power on earth has the strength to keep two opposite banks intact at once. The thirsty man's water-jars will all be smashed to bits; and then, to bring water afterward by means of a sieve, with constant comings and goings between well and home—this demand Providence will not tolerate.

Many say that the root cause of the poverty and distress that afflict this country at every step lies in the fact that the entire burden of government here rests upon a foreign race. This claim deserves examination.

The very root-principle of English political philosophy is the union of the power of the state with the power of the subjects. This political philosophy has always driven a spear into the heart of one-sided dominion—this much is not hidden even from us. This very lesson we read, in our own government schools, seated at our very desks; we learn it, and having learned it, we pass our examinations upon it. There is now no way of taking this lesson back from us.

Whether one calls it the Congress or the League, the root of it all lies exactly here. Just as the right that belongs to all of us in European science is inherent in the very nature of that science itself, so too the Indian subject's own right within the English political system lies within the very life-principle of that political philosophy itself. Any one Englishman, or ten, or five, may say: it is better not to give the Indian student the opportunity of learning science; but science itself, putting to shame the throats of those five Englishmen, will declare in a voice of thunder: "Come, all of you, whatever your race, wherever your country may be, take me and gain strength." In just the same way, any ten Englishmen, or ten thousand, may stand upon the platform of the legislature, or in the columns of a newspaper, and say that it is better to obstruct, in every possible way, the entry of Indian subjects into the governance of India—but rebuking the counsel of those ten thousand Englishmen, the political philosophy of England itself declares, in a voice of thunder: "Come, all of you,

whatever your race, wherever your country may be—in the governance of India the Indian subject has his own right; take it up."

But there is a fear that we shall hear the harsh answer that England's political philosophy does not apply in our case. This is of the same order as the claim once made by the Brahmin, that in the higher matters of knowledge, of religion, of works, the Shudra has no right. But the Brahmin had, from the very foundation, built and cemented this whole structure of differentiated rights complete and thorough—whomever he made crippled outwardly, he had made crippled inwardly too. The moment the very root is cut away on the side of knowledge, the branches and leaves on the side of action wither of their own accord. Once the root of that very knowledge was cut away from the Shudra, nothing more needed to be done; from then on, his head bent of its own accord and lay bowed forever in the dust at the Brahmin's feet. The Englishman has not closed the door of knowledge to us—and yet that very door is the great gateway to liberation. For this reason, I suppose, our rulers secretly regret it, and I do observe, little by little, a tendency to close one or two windows and doors of our schools—but still, they can never, on any day, entirely forget that to wound one's own humanity for the sake of convenience ultimately amounts to nothing less than suicide.

That our just right in the governance of India is rooted in the very psychology of the Englishman—if we can grasp this idea with real strength, then to endure much suffering, to make much sacrifice, for its sake, becomes easy for us. But if, out of our own weak habit, we say, "As the master wills, so is the deed—there is no more to be said about it," then the deep despair that follows shows itself in two forms: either we begin plotting in secret and spreading sudden mischief and disorder, or, sitting in the corner of our own homes, we whisper into one another's ears—such-and-such a Viceroy is good or bad, if such-and-such a man does not sit in the Cabinet there is no hope for us, perhaps if Mr. Morley becomes Secretary of State for India our good days will come, or perhaps it is our fate that this cat will go wild in the forest and turn into a wildcat. In other words, despair either pushes its way down into the tunnel beneath our own soil and there works a perversion of our strength,

or it sits us down in the drawing-room corner of our homes and there creates a mere futile agitation of strength; either it drives us to frenzy, or it keeps us stupefied.

But I shall not distrust humanity; I shall go forward with such conviction as this: that in English political philosophy, power alone is not the truth—principle is a truth greater than power. Every day I shall see its violation; I shall see self-interest, love of power, greed, anger, fear, and pride, all at their play; but these passions of man strike us down only where we too harbour the same passions within—where we too are terrified by petty fears, greedy for petty gains, where there is envy, hatred, distrust among ourselves. Where we are great, where we are heroic, where we are men of sacrifice, austerity, and faith—there, whatever is noble on the other side finds true union with us; there, even though beaten by the passions of the other side, we are yet victorious, if not outwardly, then within. If we are cowardly, if we are small, we shall be degrading the principle of the English government and thereby strengthening its baser passion instead. Where two parties are engaged together in any enterprise, there the union of the strength of both parties makes for the excellence of that strength, and the union of the weakness of both makes for the extremity of weakness. The very moment the non-Brahmin, with folded hands, accepted his own disqualification, that very moment the pit of the Brahmin's own decline was dug the deeper. To the strong, the weak is as great an enemy as any; to the strong, the weak is no smaller an enemy than that.

A high official, an Englishman in the Government, once said to me, "You often say that the police oppress you—I do not disbelieve it, but you never furnish proof of it." Needless to say, he did not add: go and brawl and fight with the police, so as to furnish that proof! But surely the struggle against injustice is not a matter of bodily strength; it is a struggle of moral courage, and that courage belongs to the sense of duty. To save the country from ceaseless oppression, one class of men, surely, must have the courage to prove that injustice, again and again, to proclaim it again and again. I know that even a single police constable is not merely one man, but a vast power. To defend a single police peon in a lawsuit, the Government spends thousands upon thousands of rupees. That is to say, when it comes to crossing the great ocean of the law-courts, the peon is furnished with a government steamer,

while the poor complainant must swim across the storm, without so much as a banana-raft. This is, in effect, to declare in plain terms: "My good fellow, if you are beaten, then to die in silence is exceedingly wholesome for your health." After this, one's hands and feet simply will not move. Prestige! Ah, that is indeed our old and familiar acquaintance. That is the very Master; that is the Chandi of Kavikankan's poem, the Manasa of the Behula legend; above justice, above righteousness, this alone must be worshipped, or else our bones will be ground to powder. Therefore—

O goddess, who in the governance of realms
Art established in the form of Prestige,
Salutation to thee, salutation to thee,
Salutation, salutation to thee.

But surely this is nothing but ignorance, nothing but illusion! Is that which appears to the gross eye therefore the truth? The real truth is: the Government exists for my sake. This truth is greater than all officialdom put together. It is upon this very truth that England's own strength rests—and that same strength is my strength too. The English Government loses hold of this truth too, if this truth's strength does not exist within me as well. If I am timid, if I have no faith in the very principles of English political philosophy, then the police will surely oppress, fair judgment on the part of magistrates will surely become difficult, the deity Prestige will go on demanding human sacrifice, and English rule will stand in contradiction to England's own age-old historic faith.

To this, I know, I shall hear the reply: "That principle is truer than power in the political order may be granted in theory, but to insist upon it in practice is dangerous; therefore either secretly, in perfectly silent, hot-blooded methods—or else, beneath the muzzle-cover of the Press Act, in perfectly silent, moderate methods."

"Yes, there is danger, no doubt of it; and yet, what is true in principle, I shall make true also in practice."

"But the people of our own country themselves, out of fear or out of greed, will not bear witness for justice, but against it."

"That too is true. And yet, one must abide by the truth."

"But the people of our own country themselves, for the lure of praise or reward, will strike me on the head from behind some thicket."

"That too is true. And yet, still, one must abide by the truth."

"Can one hope for so much as this?"

Yes—one must hope for exactly this much, not a jot less. From the Government too we shall make a great claim; but from ourselves we must make a claim even greater still, or else the other claim will never hold its ground. I grant that not every man is strong, and that many men are weak; but in every great country, every single day, a certain number of men are born who are the representatives of all mankind—who bear the sorrow of all upon their own shoulders, who cut the path for all with their own hands, who, in the midst of every kind of adversity, still believe in humanity, and who lie awake at the far eastern edge of the deepest darkness of failure, watching for the coming dawn. Disregarding every mockery of the faithless, they declare, with full force—

"Even a little of this righteousness delivers from great fear."

That is to say, if in the very centre there be righteousness, though it be but the smallest fraction, then there is no need to fear even the vast accumulated fears

massed upon the circumference. If in the very principle of the state there be righteousness anywhere at all, then to that alone shall we bow—not to fear. Righteousness exists; therefore, though it cost us our very lives, we must hold fast to it, even unto death.

Suppose your son has fallen gravely ill. For that reason you have brought, from far away, an English civil surgeon at great expense. Now if you suddenly see him reciting incantations, striking and clutching the patient like some ghost-exorcising sorcerer, while the patient's very soul cries out in terror—then you will surely be compelled to say to that doctor: "For pity's sake, sir, do not exorcise ghosts—treat the disease!" He may glare at you and say, "Who are you to speak? I do not do what a doctor does—I do doctoring in my own way!" If fear has not utterly overwhelmed your reason, then you have every right to say to him: "The very science of medicine by which you claim to be a doctor—I know that science to be greater than you; it is by that very science's worth that your own worth is measured."

This right, greater than any other, is founded precisely upon the science and the ethics of that very medical profession itself. However much the doctor may bluster, if he accepts the authority of that science and that ethics, he cannot help but feel shame. He may, indeed, in a fit of rage, even strike you with his fist—but still, this blow is of greater worth than your bowing meekly, pocketing your salaam along with your salary, and climbing quietly into your carriage. In striking you thus, he strikes himself far more than he strikes you. This is why I say: whatever claim is not truly England's own claim, but merely the claim of England's officials in India, if we refuse our assent to that claim, we may indeed suffer today—but tomorrow that suffering shall pass.

After a hundred and fifty years of rule in India, we have now heard such words as these: that whatever the Government of Madras may do, good or ill, the Bengali has no right even to heave a sigh over it, so far as it concerns Bengal. Until now we had always understood that it was precisely this—that under England's undivided rule, Madras, Bengal, the Punjab, Maharashtra, are becoming one, within and without—

that was the very glory that formed the Koh-i-Noor in the crown of the British Empire. Regarding the misfortune of Belgium and France as her own misfortune, England has rushed to give her life on the battlefield; and when, on the western shore of the ocean, such is the prevailing spirit, can such a principle as this even survive for a single day on the eastern shore—that Bengal shall feel no concern whatsoever for the weal or woe of Madras? Shall we bow our heads and accept such a decree as this? Do we not know, for certain, that however loudly this decree may be proclaimed aloud, there lies hidden behind it, in the heart, a very great shame? That secret shame of England's own injustice, and our own open courage of manhood—these two must be brought face to face. England stands bound to India by a bond of truth; England has borne the burden of European civilization to this eastern land; the very message of that civilization is her message of promise. That very document we shall regard, and hold to, as the greatest of all documents—and this we shall never let her say: that we crossed the sea only in order to tear India to pieces and divide the spoils among ourselves.

Whatever nation has received any great treasure has received it only that it might, from day to day, from land to land, bestow it as a gift. If that nation withholds it in miserliness, then it deprives none but itself. Europe's chief treasures are science, and the sense of unity among the common people, together with the attainment of self-government. To give India this treasure, this power, is the very charter of sovereignty that England's rule in India carries, sealed by the hand of Providence itself. To remind the rulers of this truth is a duty that falls upon us as well. For unless the two sides remain in communion, forgetfulness and corruption inevitably follow.

England may, citing her own history, say something like this: "That the self-government of the common people is so vast a thing, we ourselves came to understand only through many revolutions, and it is only through manifold striving that we built it up at all." This much I grant. In this world, one advancing group after another discovers, each in turn, some particular truth. At the very root of that discovery lie many errors, much suffering, much sacrifice. But those who reap the fruit of it are not obliged to tread the whole of that long road of error and suffering all over again. I have seen a Bengali youth go to America and there, with his own

hands, build an engine, and learn its theory besides—but if he had been required to pass through the entire historical evolution of the steam-engine, beginning from the very first heating of a kettle over a fire, then he would have needed a lifespan out of the Age of Truth itself to accomplish it. What took Europe many ages of storm and rain and wind to grow, took very little time indeed to be transplanted, root and all, into Japan. If our character and our habits show a particular deficiency in the power of self-governance, then it is precisely we who have the particular need for the practice of self-governance. If you assume, from the very outset, that there is nothing at all in any individual, then whatever there may in fact be within him will never, at any time, be discovered. Give us the opportunity of self-rule, and thereby open the path for the discovery of our own new and hitherto unknown powers—but if instead you suppress that opportunity and thereby hold us in contempt, and keep us objects of contempt in the eyes of the world forever, then nothing could constitute a more mortal enmity than this. Can any great hope ever truly survive in the mind of one whose head, the instant he takes two steps to the right or left, strikes hard against a wall—that hope by whose very strength man, in every sphere, proves his own greatness even at the cost of his own life?

I have observed that when dawn breaks in history, the sun does indeed rise in the east—but along with it, light spreads at once to the north, the south, and the west as well. If a nation's advancement had to proceed inch by inch, step by step, then even Time itself, in all its vastness, would find itself outpaced. If it were true that a man must first become wholly worthy, and only then receive opportunity, then no nation on earth today would yet be worthy of freedom. Democracy struts and boasts. But among the common people of Europe there is, even today, abundant ugliness—I have no wish to stir up such unsavoury matters. If some helmsman had once declared that so long as all this existed, Democracy should have no rights at all, then the ugliness would certainly have remained—but along with it, the very means of its natural remedy would have vanished as well.

In just the same way, in our own society, in our own conception of individual liberty, there is weakness enough and to spare—a fact that, however much we might wish to hide it, cannot be hidden. And yet we demand self-government. That the lamp in

one corner of a dark room flickers faintly is no reason to say there is no claim to light the lamp in the other corner as well. Whichever wick may be lit, we wish for light to be kindled. Today, in this great festival of illumination that is humanity, no single nation has yet been able to light every one of its lamps fully—and yet the festival goes on. The lamp in our own house has been extinguished for some while now; if we go to kindle it from your flame, there is no good reason to be angry about it. For by this your own light will not diminish—and the light of the festival as a whole will only increase.

The deity of this festival is calling us today, from within. Can the priest, by his prohibition, hold us back and keep us in check? He who beams with delight only at the sight of a rich patron, who will rush all the way to a railway station merely at the mention of Canada or Australia—and whose behaviour toward the poor is the very opposite—surely this the deity, who is watching, will not endure! And if the Indwelling Witness Himself does not show Himself within us in the form of shame at this, then He will surely show Himself, from without, in the form of wrath.

But the ground for hope lies not only in them; it lies in us as well. I hold the Bengali in high esteem. I know that the vital spirit of our youth can never, forever, wear the borrowed mask of old age and play at wisdom. And we, too, have seen among Englishmen many great souls who, though enduring reproach from their own countrymen, are eager to bring the ambrosial fruit of England's own historic tree within the reach of the people of India. On our side too, we want men who are truly men, men ready to endure suffering from without and reproach from their own kin, men who, overcoming even the fear of failure, are eager to manifest their own true humanity.

The ageless, ever-wakeful God of India is calling out today to our very soul—that soul which is boundless, that soul which is unconquerable, to which belongs an infinite share in the realm of immortality—and yet that same soul today, in the shame of blind custom and of servitude, hides its face in the dust. Blow after blow, sorrow after sorrow, He has been calling out: *ātmānaṃ viddhi*—Know thyself.

Today we have beheld, before us, this vast earth of man, this great history of man. In man we now perceive directly the Boundless One Himself; riding upon the chariot of power, He moves along the highway of the great ages of time; disease, suffering, calamity, death—none of these can hold Him back; Nature herself has come forward with a garland to receive Him as her chosen bridegroom; the radiant mark of knowledge shines gloriously upon His lofty brow; from the farthest summit of the distant future, the dawn-song of His coming already sounds. That same Boundless One is seeking, today, His own seat within me as well. O soul, decayed with untimely age, faithless and fearful of thyself, weighed down with falsehood, benighted—today is not the day for petty jealousy, petty spite, and quarrelling among the members of one's own household; the time for scrambling like a beggar after paltry hope and paltry rank has passed; today we shall no longer beguile ourselves with that false pride which is nurtured only in the darkness of one's own domestic corner, and which, before the vast assembly of the world, stands ridiculed and put to shame. To seek self-satisfaction by casting blame on others is the pastime of the impotent—we have no use for that. Age after age, our sins have piled up, heap upon heap; under their weight our manhood lies crushed, our power of judgment lies at the point of death—today is the day to cast off, with full strength and vigour, that rubbish of many centuries. The mightiest obstacle to our forward march lies behind us; our own past has, with its spell of enchantment, laid siege to our future; in its dust and its withered leaves it has dimmed today's new dawn-sun of this new age, and has overwhelmed our fresh, striving, youthful spirit. Today we must, with resolute strength, set free that backward-facing part of ourselves—only then, joining ourselves to that great and ever-forward-moving Humanity, shall we be saved from the shame of this boundless futility—that Humanity which is deathless, ever wakeful, ever seeking, the right hand of the World's Maker, the eternal pilgrim on the path of Truth illumined by the light of knowledge, at whose every new triumphal gate, age after age, a shout of victory rises and echoes from land to land.

The suffering that comes from without has, like the ceaseless rains of Shravan, poured down endlessly upon our heads; today we must make atonement for the dark impurity of this ceaseless suffering, borne passively, without will. And where

lies that atonement? In accepting suffering within ourselves, of our own free will—that very suffering becomes a sacred sacrificial fire; in that fire, sin shall burn away, folly shall rise as vapour and disperse, and inertia shall turn to ash and mingle with the earth. Come, O Lord—Thou art not the Lord of the abject and the meek alone. Whatever within us is not abject, whatever is deathless, whatever is truly sovereign, whatever divine spark there is—O Great Lord, Thou art the Lord of that very spark. Call it forth today, and seat it at the right hand of Thy royal throne. Let the abject be ashamed, let the slavish be humbled, let folly, rebuked, accept its everlasting exile.

1324 (Bengali calendar)