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FRAGMENTS OF A PRISONER'S DIARY

VOLUME ONE

CRIME AND KARMA

CATS AND WOMEN

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FRAGMENTS OF A PRISONER'S DIARY

VOLUME ONE

CRIME AND KARMA
CATS AND WOMEN

By
M. N. ROY

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION*

This is not an essay on autobiography. I have a strong dislike for the idea of writing one's own history, be it mental or physical. History is a science. Critically composed biographies have a place in historical literature. Autobiographies, however, are worthless as historical records. The incentive to write an autobiography is supplied by egoism—by the belief in one's own importance. Only people, obsessed with the idea that they are destined to play historical roles, write autobiographies. The inevitable results of that underlying motive can be counter-balanced only by an extraordinarily high degree of self-criticism. The two cannot naturally go together. One cannot be egoistic and self-critical, at the same time. Autobiographies are worth reading only as works of fine literature. Very few of them, however, can measure up to that standard. For these considerations, I have never been inclined to record the events of my life or to trace the development of my mind.

This work is a mere collection of random notes and reflections at odd moments. In prison, particularly when the term is long and the confinement solitary, one has plenty of time to kill.

* Preface to the first edition of *The Memoirs of a Cat*.

The killing of time takes place in different ways, according to the temperament and inclination of different people. Soon after I was lodged in the Barcilly Central Jail, a small kitten one day strayed into my room. I gave it some milk, and it stayed on. In course of the scientific studies I was doing at that time, I was interested in animal psychology. Animal psychology can be studied only on the basis of the principles of behaviourism. In odd moments, I used to observe how the cat behaved in different circumstances, and reflect what might be the mental process behind its psychological behaviours. Thus begun, the reflections recorded in the following pages, however, did not remain limited to strictly scientific observations. In moments of relaxation, one thought leads to another, and the chain may be prolonged at random to touch an endless variety of subjects. I thought, for future reference, a record of those thought-processes set off by the observation of this or that phenomenon, not selected, neither isolated, for the purpose of any strictly scientific study, could be kept usefully. The result was more or less long, more or less systematic, more or less complete, more or less serious, random writings which are now being published as the fragments of a prisoner's diary. They will be divided into three volumes, this being the first.

This book is incomplete in a sense. Originally, I did plan to record the events in the life of my cat, of course as long as we would be together

in jail. Six years was long enough to plan ahead. But the work was interrupted by my transfer to a different jail. The cat, of course, was not transferred. It lived in jail, but it was not a prisoner. In the absence of its subject, the biography of the cat could no longer be continued. The reflections, being very largely imaginary, could be continued even then. But the incentive was not there. Moreover, the transfer to a different jail placed me in conditions more favourable for serious scientific work. Consequently, the "Memoirs of a Cat" remained incomplete as a piece of history of questionable value. But the observations made therein are self-contained, and, though done in a light vein, are meant to provoke thought. I hope that that purpose will be served by the publication of this small volume.

Dehradun, October, 1940.

M. N. Roy.

CRIME AND KARMA
CATS AND WOMEN

CHAPTER I

A

JUSTIFICATION

WELL, ladies and gentlemen, don't be disdainful and be simply amused by this unprecedented event in the annals of literature. Whoever has heard of a cat telling the world the story of her life ! And a common, plebeian, so-to-say, cat at that. Worse still ; a " criminal " cat—by parentage. But to this highly interesting, in the sociological sense, part of my story I shall come by and by. I know you are intrigued ; in spite of the apparently amused disdain at this feline venture into literature, you are curious to hear the story. And, be sure, you won't be disappointed. It is going to be an instructive, if not a fascinating story. You see, I am not altogether unequipped for the task. I have a not too modest opinion of myself. Lack of modesty is a condition for success in literary venture. If writers were handicapped with this virtue, perhaps many of the dubiously bright lights in the firmament of literature would never shine. There are cynics who would mutter with grim humour, " That might not have been such a great misfortune ". Though not an admirer of cynicism, by which I mean the temperament that results from either a faulty or too good a digestion, I am never-

theless inclined to agree with the cynic on this particular point. Frankly speaking, except in the terms of profit, made by those engaged in the printing and publishing business, it would be difficult to account for the meteoric appearance of many literary phenomena, including not a few best-sellers. In my humble opinion, the measure of a true advance in literature should be not the number of writers, but of readers. For this opinion, I am likely to be suspected of cattishness. But I am, after all, a cat. One cannot go away from one's shadow.

It appears rather odd, doesn't it ? that, with this cattish reflection upon the numerous devotees of the fair Goddess Saraswati, I should be going to join their ranks, and increase the number of useless books in the world. But you don't expect a poor uneducated cat to be logical. A literary cat is bad enough ; a rational cat would be simply insufferable. I naturally don't wish to tax the indulgence of the reader too much in the very beginning.

Let me return to the point from which I have wandered away, just like a cat. I was going to explain why I did not plunge into my story right away. The reason is some diffidence on my part. I believe it is necessary to justify this unusual venture. How could a cat come to take it for granted that the story of its life would interest human readers ? This question might be

disposed off simply by the retort : Well, why not ? That would be, in my opinion, quite a pertinent answer to what appears to me to be a rather impertinent question. But I am not over-bearing. On the contrary, as mentioned above, it is with some hesitation that I am going to tell my story.

I have had occasions to observe men from close quarters. It may be pointed out incidentally that, having passed my short life in a prison, I have never come in contact with human beings of my sex. But I dare say that in many respects, particularly of biological nature, they feel and act much as I do myself. In addition to my personal experience, I can count upon the accumulated experience of my whole species. Although cats are never really domesticated, in the sense of being enslaved, yet, with their spit-fire nature, partially preserved against selfish human affection, my kind have acquired access to that intimate corner of human existence where all put-up appearances fall away.

We haunt the hearth and home, and therefore enjoy the uncommon opportunity of finding out man in his true nature. Unfortunately, I have not lived in a human home ; but prison is also an interesting place. Here also the beast in man creeps out of his human skin ; and one, with the keen power of cynical observation possessed by my species, encounters all sorts of amusing and illuminating mental phenomena. Besides, I have in-

herited the highly developed cynicism and studied indifference which characterise our species because we know too much. Having been taken aback by the incredible amount of human ignorance, I have come to the conclusion, after months and months of calm reflection, that it would be selfish of me to hold back the treasure of knowledge we possess. This literary curiosity is the concrete form of that altruistic conclusion.

Now, mine is not going to be a pleasant task. Necessarily, I shall have to confront man with the naked picture of himself. I shall be obliged to disregard the advice of the shrewd Indian *rishis*, namely, "*satyam bruyat, priyam bruyat, ma bruyat satyamapriyam*" (tell the truth, but tell pleasant things; don't tell unpleasant truths). Should I be bound by this time-honoured adage, then, my literary adventure might be a success; the first autobiography of a cat might be indulgently received; it might even become a best-seller, provided that the unpleasant truths left unsaid are compensated by pleasing falsehoods, loudly proclaimed as revealed truth. But in that case, my personal triumph would be bought at the cost of public benefit. Since in this literary venture I am moved by an altruistic motive, I propose to be selfless all the way through. I shall be running counter to the instinctive wisdom of my species which is notorious for selfishness. I have my full share of this invaluable heritage. I am fully self-

willed as befits a normal cat. As a matter of fact, for reasons to be stated by and by, I am more cynical, distrustful and indifferent than the average member of my race, and I delight in my perversity. But once I have assumed the role of an altruistic truth-teller, I am going to discharge it with grim determination.

The next problem I have to solve is regarding the most effective way of performing my mission. As regards the mission itself, I, of course, take it for granted. How often have I heard that India has a mission to save the world! I, being also a part of India, may naturally claim a share in that mission, although I have not the slightest idea what it really is. But pondering over the riddle at leisure, which I have in plenty, I have hit upon a solution, quite satisfactory—to myself. Whatever may be the nature of India's mission, the Indians should first of all equip themselves to perform it. I believe that I should be performing my inalienable share of India's world mission, if I reminded the chosen people of God of the fundamental teaching of their philosophy, namely, "Know Thyself". This is not exactly the Indian scriptural text. I am afraid, it has a Hellenic flavour. But I have heard it said most authoritatively that the old Greeks themselves learned from India whatever little they knew. In any case, to stress the point that one must know oneself in order to ascertain if he is fit for the mission given

to him by God, is the only practical application of the basic principle of Hindu philosophy, that "*atmajnan*" (knowledge of one's own self) is the highest ideal of human life.

It would, of course, be amazing impudence on the part of a poor illiterate cat to sermonise those who are superior to her, at least in the biological sense. I might be tempted to commit the act of insolence, if I allowed myself to be influenced by, for example, Bergson's interpretation of organic evolution. In his opinion, human organism is not to be regarded as the highest product of the process of natural selection ; on the contrary, he holds, it is indeed a deteriorated biological form. To drive his point home, the venerable dean of contemporary philosophy points out how unfavourably human organism compares, for example, with the elephantine or apine.

I don't see any valid reason why the tiger, not to mention the lion, should not be added to the list of animals that can claim superiority to man, on such high an authority. And the obviously unchallengeable right of the tiger is shared also by his aunt, which distinction belongs to the cat. Thus, if I chose to, I could justifiably lecture man. The superiority of the wisdom of the elders is traditionally admitted by the Indian social and domestic ethics. As a matter of fact, I am rather young, a little over a year old at this writing. But,

as I have mentioned already, I represent the accumulated wisdom of my race.

Besides, just as a Brahmin is a Brahmin, just so is an aunt an aunt ; age does not matter. Social privileges are due to the Brahmin traditionally. You must bow before the Brahmin even if he is illiterate or a scoundrel. He is a Brahmin nonetheless, and as such deserves the respect of all others placed lower to him in the social scale by Providential Ordinance, as the Gita teaches. Domestic relations are no less providentially arranged than social stratifications. Both are equally immutable. Just think of the Indians not implicitly following the path travelled by their forefathers in the light of revealed wisdom ! What would happen as a result of such disregard for venerable traditions ? The noble heritage of ignorance, prejudice, superstition would all go by the board. India would be denationalised.

If established rules were not implicitly obeyed, the venerable social structure of India would break down ; and there would be no ideal for the divinely ordained reconstruction of the world. The spiritual culture of India places abstract concepts which, if I may have the impertinence to point out, have become sanctified superstitions ; it has no respect for the concrete. These are illusions, irrelevant at any rate. Therefore, it is frivolous, or imitating the materialistic West, to test the wisdom of our elders by any concrete standard.

The elder is wiser ; nor should elderliness be judged by the actual number of years. Respect for abstract standards does not permit such hair-splitting. What are a few years ? They may have some significance in relation to the bodily existence. But soul is eternal. It has no age. An aunt may be young, ridiculously so, as a body ; but as a soul, that is, as her real self, she must enjoy the full privilege of auntness. And wisdom superior to that of the nephews and nieces is an abstract, absolute, and inalienable attribute of auntness. Auntness ! Really, by discovering this abstract idea, I am making some original contribution to philosophy. As far as my cattish information goes, the inventor of "Abstract Ideas", I mean Plato, did not conceive of it together with such brilliant specimens as horseness, appleness, treeness, so on and so forth.

Notwithstanding all these overwhelmingly convincing reasons, I forego the right to lecture human beings who are inferior to my magnificent nephew, the tiger. I have chosen a simpler, less offensive, but more effective, way of performing my mission—of contributing my share to the achievement of India's world mission. The way chosen is to tell the otherwise meaningless story of my life, lived among men, and therefore correctly reflecting them as they really are in their day to day existence. My record will be candid and courageous. I shall depict men, who have had

any relation with my insignificant existence, just as I have found them to be. Naturally, mine will not be a dispassionate narrative. I am not going to compose an essay on myself. I am going to record the incidents of my life.

Passion is the sign of life. To be passionless, is to be lifeless. If I did not live, there would be no story to tell. Anybody who proposes to write an autobiography dispassionately is to be pitied for self-deception. It is lying to one's own self. What is life but a sum total of hunger, love, hatred, anger, kindness? My relation with men has been determined by one or the other of such passions. My judgment of a man could not be humanly (if I may borrow the term) free from harshness, if he treated me unkindly when I was hungry. And such treatment reveals the real character of man. Having had the opportunity of observing man in his unguarded moments, and in conditions of jail life which force the beast in man to show its teeth, I claim my judgment to be objective. But objectivity does not exclude passion. Objectivity simply means correspondence with reality; and passion is the basic reality of life.

I justify my undertaking on the authority of one of the most successful scribes of our time. I mean, Bernard Shaw. I start with a similar modesty, and expect to be more successful. I expect to succeed not as an artist, but as a social critic. Literary talent contributed to Shaw's melancholy

failure in the mission he undertook in youth. I have no such handicap. Therefore, I can be confident of success in that respect. What I say will predominate how I say it.

More than forty years ago, the young Shaw wrote the following in the preface of his "Plays Unpleasant": "But in claiming place for my plays among works of art, I must make a melancholy reservation. One or two friendly readers may find it interesting, amusing, even admirable, as far as a mere topical farce can excite admiration; but nobody will find it a beautiful or a lovable work. It is saturated with vulgarity of the life it represents: the people do not speak nobly, live gracefully, or sincerely face their own positions; the author is not giving expression in pleasant fancies to the underlying beauty and romance of happy life, but dragging up to the smooth surface of 'respectability' a handful of the slime and foulness of its polluted bed, playing off your laughter at the scandal of the exposure against your shudder at the blackness. It is not my fault, reader, if my art is the expression of my sense of moral or intellectual perversity rather than of my sense of beauty".

A little above, I asked, as to why a cat should not tell the story of her life, and why it should not interest human readers. Evidently, I believe that a member of my race is fully entitled to record the events of his or her life, and that human

beings may read such stories with benefit to themselves. Presumably, this statement would be hotly disputed—by human vanity. But that vanity should be tempered by the knowledge of the very insignificant place man occupies in the grand scheme of the Universe. When man knows that he is a tiny bit of carbon crawling on a speck of cosmic dust, he should be ashamed of his vanity.

Heliocentric astronomy, revived by Copernicus, dealt the first blow to human vanity. Modern astral physics has degraded the entire solar system to the insignificance of a “freak”. If man were the special creation of God, or the finite form of the Infinite (as the Vedantist would prefer to say), why is he placed in such a humiliating position? The physical Universe, with myriads of stars of which our sun is a very ordinary one, and thousands of millions of star-galaxies, is not a gigantic stage set for man to strut about. The phenomenon of life, particularly in the form of human ego-centrism, is not the cream of the cosmic scheme. It is rather a blemish in the magnificent harmony of things. I am a part of this blemish, just as much as is Rabindranath Tagore or Edgar Wallace. Indeed, the discredit belongs equally to every bit of crawling protoplasm.

All forms of higher life—man, monkey, horse, dog, cat, bat, to name only a few—grow each out of an egg which is absolutely uniform in all cases. The one of my origin was a tiny lump of

primal slime. Great writers also have been hatched out of similar lumps of protoplasm. Nor does the uniformity stop there. It can be traced up to a much later stage of organic evolution. If you compare myself in embryo, that is when I was less than two months old in the mother's womb, with the greatest human scribe in the same condition, one could not be distinguished from the other. The father's contribution was just the same in either case—one sperm, microscopically small but of albumen formed like a diminutive tadpole. Also in both the cases, the mother supplied the identically constructed egg to be fertilised by the sperm. The body of this poor cat as well as of the great man evolved out of that identically insignificant, and what is more important, accidental, beginning, to the specific morphological state of its birth. In either instance, it thrived as a parasite on the maternal organism. What the mother contributed, she in her turn got from the sun as chlorophyl. Since we entered into the independent existence on earth, we derived our sustenance, composed of identical substances, from solar radiation. Not only the imposing body of the great man, but also his supposedly superior brain, indeed the entire wealth of extraordinary "spiritual" qualities he is credulously credited with, have absolutely no other mysterious foundation than the accidental combination of the fatherly sperm with the motherly egg, and chemical com-

pounds (mostly carbon) produced from the sun. Just the same is the case with me. The utter groundlessness of human vanity is revealed in the light of these incontestable biological facts.

Anatomically, my modest frame (I am very proud of it) stands scientific comparison with the skeleton that supports the lofty stature of any man believed to be possessed of super-human powers or divine qualities. Examine the two, bone for bone, joint for joint, and you will be surprised to see how very little qualitative difference there is. Even morphologically, that is, in the form of structure, the noble biped is but little differentiated from his lowly cousins who still prefer to walk securely on all fours. Carry the comparison further, and I shall not be at a much greater disadvantage. Take, for example, my brain, unless you are foolish enough to laugh at the idea of a cat claiming to have brain, in the figurative sense, for physically you can hardly deny me one. Yes, take, for instance, brain—the climax of organic evolution ; I mean, climax as a part of the physical process, not its by-product. Place the modest lump of the clammy stuff lodged behind my shamefully receding forehead, by the side of the spiritual dynamo in the noble cranium of a genius, who is naturally a man. Ask an expert physiologist to have a look at both. Except for the possible difference in bulk, he might have insuperable difficulty to identify them with their respec-

tive owners. So, you see, it is not altogether excluded biologically that a cat should be what you call a genius. How do you know that I am not one? You may now realise the force of my question—"Why not?"—with which I retorted the possible question meant to ridicule my literary ambition.

At this stage of the defence of my intrusion in the temple of Saraswati, hitherto reserved for man, still another embarrassing question has to be answered. If the quadruped cousins of man are not theoretically excluded from the biological equipments of a genius, how can the utter absence of any manifestation be explained? Well, I am not caught unawares. The question is easily answered, although it is rather irrelevant. Some knowledge of the theory of relativity, which, transcending its native sphere of physics, is bound to revolutionise the entire human ideology (Vedantists, beware of the danger!), should discourage such naive questions. You cannot interpolate human standards in our world. Because, a cat or a dog or a monkey has never been guilty of the bad manners and disgusting traits of character that are associated with the so-called great men, you jump to the conclusion that there has been no manifestation of genius in the history of the races of non-human animals.

Man is so limited intellectually that he is utterly incapable of understanding anything unless

expressed in the system of phonetics called human language. His egocentrism quite amazingly and illogically has made a virtue out of this really humiliating restriction upon his power of expression and understanding. He stakes his claim to superiority on the doubtful ground that the power of articulated speech marks him out as a special creation of his God. I say, *his* God, because his God, being made by himself after his own image, must be a human God, utterly incapable of having any mutual understanding with the rest of the organic forms evolved out of the primeval slime. We, naturally, have no use for such God. Our God must be of our kind. A nice, swaggering tom cat, for example, is the ideal object of adoration and worship for a young pretty thing like myself. (By the way, did I mention my sex ?) Being an Indian she-cat, I, of course, have inherited the most outstanding and lyrically praised characteristics of Aryan womanhood. The male being, to whom she happens to be hitched on, is the God incarnate for the female. This is not particularly an Indian principle ; for, essentially, this idealised code of female conduct is based upon a carnal, and therefore natural, desire. I share this habit of the female to worship the male ; because it is the sublimated super-structure of a biological urge which is the only convincing expression of divine purpose, if one is to make such an assumption to make up for human ignorance. But let me not

belongs. He thinks that he has ceased to be animal; and certainly has forfeited the super-human (you might say, sub-human, let us therefore compromise on the more comprehensive term: extra-human) attributes that belong to the animal. To be different is not necessarily to be superior. Man says that he has lived down his animal self. I wonder if he really has. Biology certainly does not justify the pretension. Modern psychology has scant respect for the vanity of man. Psycho-analysis, for example, demonstrates, cruelly and rather cynically, that human behaviour, base as well as noble, is determined by purely animal motives.

Well, all these are man's own concern. I refer to them now in brief, and shall treat them later in detail, because they have contributed so much to the bitterness of my life. But the point I wish to make at this stage is that man is utterly unable to understand even those animals who are only his first, second or third cousins. Take, for example, the horse, an animal supposed to be loved, cherished and understood by man. But ask the horse: he may have something different to say. Has any man ever even thought of taking the opinion of the horse before writing lyrically about the faithfulness of that noble animal? That is just human—to judge the world by his own primitive standard. Anyone that is useful to him, is praised. Man's love for the horse is but

the love for himself. If anyone really loved his horse, could he practise the brutality of making the beloved animal run with the loving master sitting proudly on his back? Or make him or her run races, often at the risk of limbs and life, so that the owner may acquire the distinction of having won some coveted trophy? It may be asked, why then do the horses appear to be pleased at the cruelties and humiliation they are subjected to by their loving masters? Well, you may just as well ask the German people as to why they all enthusiastically voted for Hitler, whose declared object is to degrade an enlightened nation to mediæval barbarism. The German people as well as the pampered horses would very likely give the puzzling reply: Do we, really? The one submits no more enthusiastically to the loving cruelties of the master than the other goose-steps at the noisy strain of brass bands and give the Roman salute exclaiming: Heil Hitler! In both the cases, it begins with coercion, and continues as slavish habit which, however, ill-conceals the underlying resentment.

My point is that man domesticates animals for his selfish motive. The Hindu worships the cow with no nobler purpose. I have blundered upon a ticklish question; so, I may just as well avail of my blundering for saying a few words about it.

The quaint customs of cow-worship has been rationalised by the modern Hindu intellectual. It

has been appreciated even by critical people as the picturesque expression of a noble sentiment. I do not propose to enter into any controversy. I only desire to suggest that one should approach the subject from the point of view of an actual problem and practical necessity. All progressive Indians, particularly those with nationalist inclinations (progressiveness and nationalism are not inseparable), agree that Hindu-Muslim unity is a condition for the social and national advancement of the Indian people. But how many of them have seriously and critically tried to ascertain the concrete obstacles to the much desired unity ?

Apart from historical causes of indirect nature, which are not spontaneously operative as far as the large bulk of the population is concerned, the main bone of contention is the cow. It would be difficult to find any other single direct cause which contributes more to the communal tension. I should not be accused of extravagance if I said that the choice before the Hindu to-day is between the venerable custom of worshipping the *Gomata* and continued national subjugation. Looked at from this point of view, cow-worship does not appear to be a typically Indian expression of idealism ; it is found to be a stout link in the chain of national slavery.

All antiquated social institutions and religious prejudices have the same sinister significance ; and cow-worship is a superstition. Instead of misapply-

ing their intelligence to the task of rationalising institutions which have lost all social usefulness, young Indians should develop the faculty of criticism.

Let us dwell a little longer on this very familiar topic of cow-worship. No rational man would maintain that there is really any particular godliness in this particular animal. If it were really a question of seeing the World Soul in every form of life, why did the *Rishis* pick out one particular species to be the object of their pantheistic devotion? When the typical Hindu attitude towards animals is observed, little of pantheism is detected. I happen to know it from personal experience. The old-fashioned Hindu has a strong antipathy for my race; and the greater the orthodoxy, that is religiosity, the greater the antipathy. The best part of my short life has been lived in close touch with many Hindus of average orthodoxy. The treatment I received from them would have made my life a hell, had there not been other factors for compensation. And you would be surprised to know the reason for that attitude. I myself, with all my cynicism and sophistication, would scarcely believe it, had I not heard it many times over with my own ears. The cats are considered to be bad animals, worthy not even of ordinary kindness, not to mention worship, because they are *not useful*,—literally, as I have heard said so often, “one can have no benefit out of them”.

After this experience, could I be expected to take the rationalised version of cow-worship seriously ? There is a whole series of animals which are believed to be impure by the orthodox Hindu. If the Hindus really have a pantheistic attitude towards all forms of life, there should be no such anomaly in their practical behaviour. Cow-worship is not an expression of pantheism ; it is the outcome of a utilitarian philosophy. Indeed, there is no philosophy about it. It is a matter of material necessity. An interesting side-light on the spiritualist culture of India !

How did the cow secure a place in the Hindu pantheon ? That is a question of the history (and also of the philosophy) of religion. It is beyond the intellectual depth of a modest cat to attempt an investigation in that line ; nor would it be quite relevant. Nevertheless, while at it, I cannot resist the temptation of hazarding an opinion.

I think that the only rational answer to the question should be obvious to a critical thinker. The curious custom was the product of a social necessity. Once upon a time, cattle must have been rather scarce in India. Indeed, topographical and climatic conditions of the country are not very suitable for a healthy growth of the bovine species. Even to-day in India, cattle, while numerous, are generally of an inferior kind with a marked tendency to deteriorate. They cannot thrive only on rank vegetation. They require highlands and the

dry cold air associated with such region. The inhabitants of the Central Asiatic plateau were pastoral people, because the country was very suitable for breeding cattle. When a tide of immigration from Central Asia swept over the Hindu-kush and reached the plains of Northern India, not many cattle could accompany it. The road was too difficult and cold for bovine animals. The nomads from Central Asia were used to place the highest value on cattle. The treasure was scarce in the new country. Naturally, there was a general anxiety to preserve the few there were. On the other hand, the Aryans were meat-eating people. So, there was the danger of the few available cattle being eaten up soon. The original Hindu scriptures (not the comparatively modern, mostly post-Buddhist, rationalised texts) are full of evidence to the effect that beef was an usual article of food. The intellectual heritage of India was the creation of beef-eating and *soma*- (a kind of alcoholic beverage) drinking *Rishis*. But in the new country, the nomadic immigrants became gradually civilised. They abandoned the nomadic life, and took to the cultivation of the soil. Although the conquered natives were forced to perform all productive labour, yet, cattle were found to be valuable for the purpose. An ox could be more useful socially as a means of production, that is, as a beast of burden, than as an article for consumption. Utility was transformed into divinity. Backward peoples

can think only in terms of religion. The members of the bovine species were spared outright slaughter only to be condemned to lifelong toil for the benefit of man. The cow was spared her flesh and raised to the honoured rank of Mother ; for the advantage, she was to give up her own children to slavery to the lust of man. It would be highly interesting to know what would the bovine animal prefer—to be slaughtered all at once, or condemned to lifelong toil. Having regard for the fact that cattle raised as article for consumption are well-fed and taken care of, one would surmise their choice. I, for example, should make no mistake, and presume that, given the choice, my bovine cousins would be equally wise. A short comfortable life is immensely preferable to endless years of dreary toil.

But I wish to distribute the blame equitably. The bovine animals suffer also for their own foolishness of allowing themselves to be domesticated. They proved useful to man, and man with his superior cunning has been making use of them. We cats, for example, are wise not to be useful. The devout Hindu, therefore, hates us, denies us any share of the divine spirit believed to be present in all forms of life. But we are free ; and there is nothing more divine than freedom. I wish you orthodox Hindus to realise this homely truth. That will do your souls no end of good.

Neither does my sense of justice permit me to

blame the Hindus for sparing the cow her flesh in return for the perpetual slavery of her progeny. There was no ethical question involved. It was a matter of social necessity. Slavery of man as well as of animals has been the foundation of all antique civilisation. There would be no Greek culture without the institution of slavery. There would be no Brahmanic wisdom without the *Sudras*. The only thing that any reasonable person is likely to find objectionable, is the effort of the modern Hindu intellectuals to rationalise the custom.

One of the *post factum* reasons advanced by the modern believer in the ancient cow-cult is humanitarianism. This reason is utterly unconvincing. Hinduism allows the sacrifice of all sorts of animals. Why should one be humane to one particular species? If the point is pressed, with insistence, in order to rationalise an antiquated institution, the noble sentiment of humanitarianism itself is discredited; its utilitarian, that is, vulgar materialistic basis is laid bare. The cow was to be spared because she could be more useful as the producer of many beasts of burden than as food. Humanitarianism was invented for the purpose. Reason would not persuade the founders of the spiritualist Aryan culture to resist the lust for beef for the sake of common good. Therefore, there had to be a *taboo* with religious sanction. The modern Hindu would argue, that the sacrifice of other animals is not allowed by the original Scriptures.

In answer, let him be reminded that neither do the Vedas contain the cult of cow-worship. The Vedic Rishis themselves were robust meat-eaters. In any case, I can assure you from my personal experience that the average Hindu is not particularly humane—more so than any other group of bipeds on a similar cultural level. Believe me, I have been inhumanly treated by them.

Next I incidentally touch also the cult of vegetarianism. Being the member of a carnivorous species, I naturally feel very strongly on this point. My race is hated by the Hindu ostensibly because it is carnivorous. Every time I caught a prey, my orthodox Hindu neighbours looked upon me as an irredeemable sinner,—as the most hateful animal profaning God's earth. Well, I should not anticipate. My experience will be related by and by. Now only a few words about vegetarianism as a justification for the unreasonable aversion to cow-killing.

Firstly, if any religion sanctions the eating of some sort of meat, there is absolutely no reason to prohibit a particular kind. If to eat meat is bad for body and soul, goat's meat should not be differently treated from beef. Total vegetarianism, preached and practised only by certain Hindu sects and castes, is no more reasonable. It may be justified by the dogma of the three *Gunas* ; but scientifically, that is all nonsense. There is little difference between meat and vegetable in the strict

chemical sense ; and the influence of food on body as well as on mind (also on soul, supposing there is any) is to be judged from its chemical composition. The nourishment required by the human body must be composed of certain chemicals in certain quantities. You must have that, no matter what you eat,—beef or ghee or boiled banana. The physical system of the pure vegetarian, if it is kept in proper condition, takes in, of necessity, exactly the same quantities of the same chemical stuffs as taken by one living on meat. The ability to digest and assimilate is a question of habit. As a matter of fact, common people, forced by tradition and religious prejudice to live on a purely vegetarian diet, as is the case in many parts of India, are likely to be intellectually dull and physically deteriorated. In order to get the minimum quantity of carbo-hydrate and protein, required indispensably by a normal human system, one must eat such a large quantity of rice, gram or maize, that the digestive function consumes more energy than normally assigned to it. In consequence, mental activities are dulled. Milk products in sufficient amount, high-class grains and vegetables, fruits, which may provide the necessary nourishment *economically*, that is, without much misuse of energy, are not available to the great masses of the people, who are therefore generally under-nourished, and mentally dull owing to the necessity of using greater energy for securing an inadequate nutri-

tion from a large bulk of trash they eat. Repudiation of the cult of vegetarianism is a condition for the physical improvement and intellectual awakening of the Indian masses. Let this insignificant member of a carnivorous species tell you : Eat more meat ; that is a high-road to the salvation of your precious souls. One lesson you shall learn from the story of my life is that carnivorous animals are never quite domesticated ; that is, voluntary slavery, so highly praised as virtue in the herbivorous bovine species, is detestable to us. The dog seems to be an exception,—the perverse traitor to the carnivorous race. But I shall have something to say about the loyalty of the dog later on. That may throw some light on the paradoxical situation.

Let me revert to the main current of my story. The power of articulated speech separates man from the rest of the animal world. It makes possible the process of intellectual development of which man is so very proud. But there is another side of the picture. Prejudice and hypocrisy result from the power of speech, and they are effective checks upon real intellectual development.

Originally, language evolved as the medium for expressing emotions, and later on, ideas. Eventually, the original relation was reversed : Language became a fetter upon the freedom of feelings and ideas. Human mind became conventionalised. It came to be dominated by terms. Nothing has been so harmful for the spiritual development of man

than the tyranny of words. Take the Holy Scriptures (of any religion), for example. These collections of words teach man to falsify his feelings, that is, to be hypocritical to himself ; to hide his emotions, that is, to turn life into a huge lie ; and to abjure the freedom of thought. One cannot think freely for himself, and believe at the same time—in the religious sense. God is substituted by the name of God. The great bulk of the Hindu population devoutly believe in the spiritual efficacy of the habit of exclaiming : “ Ram Ram ” or “ Hari Hari ” or “ Shiva Shiva ”. I have heard any number of grown-up people expatiating upon the common cant that *dharma* is the essence of life. But ask them what is *dharma* ; hardly one in a thousand has any definite notion about what the so freely and frequently used term stands for. It is a word, and millions of people have forfeited the most rudimentary faculty of thought under the tyranny of words. Even when the word *dharma* is associated with some concrete meaning, it only stands for a body of superstitions, prejudices, social customs and irrational modes of living. These again are not uniform. They vary from place to place, and from sect to sect. But if you ask why these customs are observed or why such and such ceremonies are performed, the answer is that they are prescribed by *dharma*. So, we come back to the question : What is *dharma* ? The entire

human existence is dominated by a meaningless word or indefinable term.

Those who wish to raise religion above a disharmonious body of habits and superstitions, define *dharma* as practices which help one to have a glimpse of the reality of the world,—the World Soul. This is the definition given by Gandhi who is popularly acclaimed as the embodiment of the true essence not only of Hinduism, but of all religion. This refers the question back to still another word which also is utterly meaningless, because it stands for something admittedly indefinable. None can tell what is the *Paramatma* like. That mythical creation of human fantasy is beyond description in words, and not to be reached by mind. How is, then, one to know that the imaginary glimpse supposed to be got through prescribed practices, is a glimpse of the mystic World Soul? Is this not again submitting entire life to the tyranny of a word?

I know all about the specious definitions of the term *dharma*. But that is rationalisation—to make a prejudice appear reasonable and even necessary. The definition most favoured by the modern Hindu intellectual is: *Dharma* is that which supports the world (human society). But who is to decide what supports the world? For the religious, this question is irrelevant. The decision has been made once for all. It is recorded in the Scriptures. Follow the scriptural injunctions, and

all will be well. Again, we are back to words. To get out of this vicious circle, Hinduism teaches that, in the beginning, there was the word. (Christianity also says the same thing). The mystic symbol and sound Om is believed to be the foundation of language, and therefore to contain the essence of truth. It is highly interesting to note that it can hardly be classified as a part of articulated speech. It is a sound which can be made by other animals than man. My mighty nephew, for instance, makes it to the terror of man. But the modern rationaliser (not rationalist) is there to protest against this profanity. He says that "Om" is a composite sound: A plus U plus M. Granted this is so, it is difficult to understand how the situation is improved. What the theory proves, if it proves anything, is that this sound originated with such primitive human beings as spoke a language only with two vowels and one consonant. Men who are so backward in the process of developing articulate speech are scarcely differentiated from lower animals. Here we find not even a word, but a partially articulated sound, dominating the entire spiritual life of a people.

Why should one be spiritually elevated simply by repeating this half-articulated sound? Why "Mew Mew" should not serve the same purpose for me? How can a meaningless syllable be the mystic emblem of the impersonal God? How can one have religious feeling through the pre-

posterous habit of imitating the sound while belching lustily after a huge meal? All these and innumerable other questions of the kindred nature can be silenced by the tyranny of words. Don't think, but believe—that is the doctrine for the propagation of which language was useful in the earlier stages of human development; and by far the greater bulk of mankind is still languishing in those stages of mental slavery imposed by the development of articulated speech. India is still far away from the freedom from the tyranny of "*Bakya Brahma*".

Take, for example, your nationalist movement as represented by the Congress. It is dominated by a bunch of words and terms—*swaraj*, non-cooperation, non-violence, sacrifice, suffering. To this already rich quasi-moral political vocabulary, some terms of pure metaphysics have been added, the most notable being truth. Every Congressman swears to practise truth and non-violence in thought, word and deed. It is generally believed that these ethical terms and metaphysical concepts endow Indian nationalism with a spiritual halo. Everybody repeats these terms, but few stop to think what they really mean. The result is intellectual stagnation, and hopeless confusion regarding the socio-political object of the movement.

The tyranny of the word "truth" is the worst. No other word in the human vocabulary is

so undefinable. Yet, it has become a fashionable slogan with the Congressman. He no doubt feels morally elevated when he takes the vow of truth. But he never inquires about the nature of the goddess he swears allegiance to. What is truth? I challenge any devotee of the goddess to answer this simple question.

When I am hungry, it is unquestionably true that I am hungry; nature testifies to it. I see a bowl of milk, and lap it up without taking the trouble of asking the permission of the owner. Besides, there is very little chance of the permission being granted even if solicited. So, here is another truth; most human beings, with all their claim to moral superiority, are not inclined to sacrifice in favour of a hungry animal, unless this is useful to them. Now, how would you characterise my act of lapping up the bowl of milk without the owner's permission? It is stealing—an evidence of moral depravity ascribed to my species. But do you ever stop to think that this act of moral depravity is committed in a situation brought about by the combination of two truths?

In order to wiggle out of this uncomfortable fix, you have invented other moral dogmas—another set of meaningless words. You preach self-control and sacrifice. I must learn to control my carnal desires, so that I might resist the temptation of stealing even when hungry. But the real motive behind this moral doctrine is not to cure me of my

depravity, but to find a safeguard for the bowls of milk belonging to men. Safeguard is not an invention of the British gentlemen who composed the Government of India Act, 1935. It has been the basic institution of human society ever since it came to be based upon the privilege for the few at the cost of the many.

Besides, you are so blinded by the anxiety to protect the privileges of your race, that you set up a moral doctrine which strikes at the root of all morals which is religion. If it were sinful to eat when hungry, God would have made animals differently—without stomachs. Hunger is, therefore, God-given. To satisfy it is to obey the law of Providence. To starve rather than to steal the milk, which would most probably never be given voluntarily, therefore, does not constitute a virtue—of self-control; it is committing the sacrilege of proposing to make the world better than God has created it. This amounts to a denial of God. Because, if you really believe in God, you can never think that things could be otherwise or better than made by him. Any such thought implies atheism and strikes at the root of dogmatic ethics which has kept the human race enslaved through ages. Unless there is some super-natural standard, there can be no authority for the absoluteness of concepts represented by such terms as truth, justice, etc.

As regards the other moral virtue—sacrifice,

don't you think it would be more appropriate to preach it to the owner of the bowl of milk ? By addressing the sermon to me, you are again safeguarding the bowl of milk for its owner who has misappropriated it from the calf.

Take another example—this time concerning your own kind. In this case, you would perhaps see the point more clearly. One must always tell the truth. To lie is a sin. Now, suppose someone's son has committed an offence punishable by law. If the man tells a lie, his son can escape the penalty of law. What should the man do in such a painful predicament ? Tell the truth, or perform his paternal duty, which is to protect the son from danger ? Truth here runs counter to a natural feeling which is supposed to elevate man above the animal.

There are innumerable such instances when practice of truth not only violates some other code of morality, but often amounts to a veritable lie. In such predicaments, man must choose between the gods involved, although both of them are equally fickle. Subjected to the tyranny of words, man has lost the faculty of acting naturally, that is, according to his own judgment which can be correct only when determined by spontaneous emotion.

Whenever I chance upon a bowl of milk, a very rare occurrence in the world I am condemned to live in, owing to some crime committed in a pre-

vious life, or a sheer whim on the part of my parents, my first impulse is to go straight at it. I am not ashamed of this impulse because it is a law of my physical being. Borrowing from the human language, I can say that it is a part of the providential arrangement which has made me a cat. If the Providence thought that such an impulse is bad, that it mars the harmony of his dispensation, he surely could have easily left it out of my system. In short, when I obey the impulse to steal, I simply act according to the will of God. I am sure that any normal human being feels a similar impulse in an analogous situation. If he usually appears to control the impulse, that is not because of any moral superiority, but simply because of cowardice. He is either afraid of others calling, and even punishing, him as a thief, or he is ashamed of himself. In the latter case, it is worse.

However it may be with human beings, I know no inhibition, and therefore look upon the rarely available bowl of milk as God-sent, and lap it up with no moral scruple, although with the fear of being beaten. What else could I do? From experience I know that my chance of getting it by truthful, legal and peaceful means, that is, by begging from the owner, is less than one to ten. On the contrary, the chance is very much greater if I follow the sovereign truth of my God-given impulse, and let legality and peace go

by the board. I violate the law when I drink the milk seldom to be had for asking, without the permission of the owner. If I had the misfortune of being a member of the barbarous institution called civilised human society, I would be punished, if caught, which seldom happens to those who can steal cleverly. My prosecutors would never stop to enquire how much chance I had of getting the permission; instead, they calculate my responsibility by their standard. Their logic is simple. The milk did not belong to me; therefore, I had no right to drink it even if I died of hunger. They are indifferent to that possible tragedy.

Possession is nine points in law. I wonder how many people stop to think that man-made laws are always violating the laws of God. Stealing is also violence. It is only a milder form of robbery. But the queer thing is that, if you go a step farther, black becomes white. Conquest is robbery on a large scale; yet that has not been placed under a moral taboo or the penalty of any law. To-day the Indians decry conquest, because they are the victims. All the moral cants preached on that score are entirely unconvincing. No sensible man can possibly believe that non-violence is inherent in Hindu humanitarianism, so long as Rama, Krishna, Arjun, Bhim etc. remain the ideals of Hindu manhood. Those mythical heroes are glorified for their feats of conquest and acts of wholesale violence. Those very Indians who con-

demn the conquest of one people by another, nevertheless prove the greatness of their forefathers on the strength of their over-seas dominions. Stealing being a modest form of conquest, is, of course, an act of violence, but precisely for that very reason, it is creditable and a matter of pride. If everybody had the moral courage to steal, there would be no thief in the world.

To return to the point. If I act under the first impulse, that is, under the law of my being, I am usually successful in satisfying my hunger. The inference is that to act so represents a correct judgment of the situation. I might act differently, solicit the owner's permission. The first difficulty is the inability of man to understand me. As soon as I say: "Mew Mew", he drives me away without any consideration of what I might want. He does not stop to think that an animal also becomes hungry and must satisfy it by hook or crook. He also acts under impulse; but his impulse is not natural like mine. It is conditioned. He acts automatically to defend his bowl of milk against depredation. He was not born with the bowl of milk. It is not a part of his physical being as hunger, or desire, if you like, is mine. Hunger or desire is God-given. If you are religious, or believe in the teleological view of the world, you cannot deny this without contradicting your faith or philosophy. Any physical impulse is God-given. Property, on the contrary, is acquired by

man himself. My relation to the bowl of milk is providentially ordained ; the owner's is guaranteed by man-made law ; it is an artificial obstacle to the free realisation of Divine Will.

In the first place, the milk belongs to some cow ; secondly, it has come to the possession of the man through the privation of its natural and rightful receiver—the calf. Thus, the ownership of the bowl of milk has been acquired through violence committed against the maternal feeling of the cow and the physical necessity of the calf. Thirdly, for the time being, it was not needed by the man. For all these and other subsidiary considerations, I am more justified in stealing it (I use this incorrect term in the absence of a more appropriate one) than the man in guarding it against my attack.

But the vast bulk of mankind, notwithstanding their superior intelligence, are debarred from taking this sane view of the situation. They can think only in terms of words. Originally, words were names given to things, emotions, feelings, relations, ideas. In course of time, names assumed independence of what they originally stood for. The empty words were woven into a net in which human mind was caught.

This is a topic of such an absorbing interest and supreme importance that no apology is needed for my dwelling upon it still a little longer. Language has been always used, and it is used even

to-day to a great extent, not as the medium for the expression of emotions, but to hide or rationalise emotions.

Sexual attraction is a fundamental attribute of higher organisms. Thanks to the power of articulated speech, human beings invented a word for it—love. Eventually, the word “love” came to mean all sorts of imaginary sentiments ; its real sense was lost in a cloud of hypocrisy and lie. The foolishness went to the extent of declaring that love is a spiritual sentiment ; to connect it with sexual attraction is to debase it. But however much he may moralise, man can never run away from his own shadow, so to say. Sex-impulse is a basic law of his or her being. It must be satisfied. As a matter of fact, the law of physical being is obeyed, biological necessity is complied with ; but it is done hypocritically. Man has become ashamed of himself.

The veil of hypocrisy which hides, and unsuccessfully tries to suppress, the natural inclination for the joy of sex-life, is again woven out of words. The word *Brahmacharya* occupies the centre of the travesty of hypocrisy. Under the prejudice represented by this word, the deluded honest are driven into a losing battle against the sovereign authority of nature. A battle that can never be won can be kept up only through the employment of sham, subterfuge and camouflage. One is obliged to practise lie and hypocrisy in order to purify his

physical being and to attain high intellectual powers! One cannot lay claim to any spiritual attainment unless he believes in, and pretends to practise, *Brahmacharya*. You must believe in the word, even if you experience the impossibility of practicing it. The tyranny of one single word does not permit you to be frank. Anyone with some knowledge about the construction and function of the human body, will tell you that sex-intercourse within certain limits does no harm. The fluid discharged in that act does not contribute to any extraordinary physical power through its hypothetical retention. Indeed, the retention is positively harmful for the adult. The sperm has a specific function in organic mechanism—to fertilise the ovum. It serves no other purpose. Modern psychology has discovered that active suppression or subconscious inhibition of the sex-impulse is the cause of grave mental derangements. Strange road to high intellectual powers!

If literature is the record of feelings and emotions, it must be liberated from the monopoly of man in order to rise up to its full stature. Under man's monopoly, it presents a distorted or falsified picture of feelings and emotions. Either animals should break into the monopoly, following my example, or men and women should have the courage and honesty to own upto their natural impulses.

In the accursed West, modern literature, to

some extent, has freed itself from the noble human qualities of falsehood and hypocrisy. There are men and women who are not ashamed of their feelings and emotions. There are artists who are neither mystics nor mythologists. But in India, literature is still "human" par excellence. It has no use for reality. For it, truth is only a word to be repeated sanctimoniously, but never to be practised. The heroes and heroines of Indian fiction are pictures of falsehood; because they do not correspond to anything which really exists in this mortal world. The pre-dominating theme of Indian literature is love, which is depicted in such a way that it has nothing to do with the real emotion. Even the delightfully sexual lyrics of Vidyapati, Chandidas, Jaydev, and even of Rabindranath in our own days, are interpreted as mystic accounts of spiritual elevation, of an erotic communion with the impersonal God! The legendary tales of the philanderings of a youthful cowherd and the delicious abandon of the milkmaids, jolted out of all inhibition by the flood of tropical spring, are given a dull scriptural value, and even a philosophical content is read in them—mutual attraction between *Jeevatma* and *Param-atma*. The realities of life are still taboo in Indian literature, which is saturated with vapid romanticism, sloppy sentimentality and love degraded to a hypocritical spiritual experience.

In India, even to-day, man wants to be God.

The woman, who is usually more sensible, is also corrupted by the hypocritical epithet of "Devi". Notwithstanding all the verbiage about love, women cannot have any illusion about man's real attitude towards them. Running after the illusive ideal of godness, man loses sight of the reality of his being. An illusive goal, of course, can never be reached. Man can never be God. Only trying to hide his humanness, he becomes the embodiment of hypocrisy and falsehood. Literature hitherto has been mostly devoted to the rationalisation of this degradation.

As regards intelligence, modern psychology has blown up the bubble of man's qualitative superiority to the lower animals. I employ the usual term "lower" with protest. Man is really a degraded and depraved animal. In reality, he or she is an animal. His whole being, including the much vaunted spiritual qualities, is determined by impulses which are common to all the higher forms of organisms. He is so proud of his intelligence ; but he knows so mighty little of the animal instincts that dominate the thin layer of his conscious mind. We animals follow our instincts unashamed and voluntarily. Man is a slave of the animal instincts which compose his sub-conscious mind. He is like an ox, driven under the yoke. The most scientific school of modern psychology—behaviourism—deprives man of mind, and reduces him to a mere organic machine. In view of this

scientific evidence, is it not insolent of man to look down upon all but his own species as lower animals ?

We, the so-called lower animals, act instinctively ; that is to say, we obey the laws of nature which the religious should regard as expressions of the Divine Will. Instinct is the motive force of all human action. This has been established by modern psychology. Even Macdougall, neither a behaviourist nor a psycho-analyst, subscribes to this view. In his opinion also, human beings act to satisfy their instincts ; without instinctive impulse, they can neither act nor think. The spiritual superiority of the human being is a fiction. Indeed, the endeavour of man to rationalise his instincts, to clothe his animal impulses in the deceptive garb of intellectuality and morality, is a sign of spiritual perversity. For, thereby they pretend to improve upon the word as made by God. If you believe in God, don't prostitute your faith and insult your God. If there is a Divine Will, let its absolute sovereignty remain unchallenged.

Don't pretend to be something different from, and superior to, what you really are. Don't be ashamed of your animal nature, and the full glory of manhood and humanness will be yours. Run after the illusion of realising the spiritual essence of man, and you will degrade yourself ; for, in that case, you will be living a life of lie and hypocrisy.

Mentally as well as physically, human being is dominated not by his consciousness, which is supposed to be the spark of divine light ; all his thoughts as well as actions are determined by the "Unconscious" which is the accumulated store of natural impulses. The heritage of the whole animal ancestry of man is deposited in that store. The mental or spiritual aspect of human being is like an iceberg : Only a small part appears above the level of consciousness, the rest remaining submerged in the Unconscious. This remainder, which is called the unconscious mind, or simply the Unconscious, is not only the larger, but the more important part of human personality. Emotions, consciously felt, ideas, consciously held, acts, consciously performed, all originate in the Unconscious, so that the Unconscious determines the content of consciousness. This being the case, the conscious part of human mind—that is, rationalised emotions, imaginary ideas, hypocritical acts—is a secondary factor ; because its contents and functions are determined by forces lying deep down—in the essentially animal being of man.

This, in brief, is the view of the other prevalent school of modern psychology—psychoanalysis. According to this school of psychology, which has proved to be of great value for mental therapeutics, to discover, and allow unrestricted expression to the animal impulses, hidden in the dark region of the Unconscious, is the only way

to a normal spiritual life. Natural impulses are allowed to appear in the realm of consciousness only after they have gone through the process of "sublimation". What is called conscience acts as the censor, and would not permit civilised human beings to act according to the impulses inherent in their very existence, unless these are dressed up in the glittering garbs of hypocrisy and falsehood.

The Hindus have the symbol of *Lingam*. Nothing bears out the Freudian theory of the *libido* more pointedly. The natural desire for the pleasure of sexual life is suppressed by the cult of Brahmacharya; but nature takes her revenge. Sex-instinct is one of the two sovereign factors of the higher forms of organic existence. It cannot be suppressed. So, it appears in the singular custom of worshipping the sex organ as the symbol of God. The sovereign power exacts homage as if with vengeance. Religious ceremonies and social institutions of the Hindu provide innumerable instances of the sublimation of natural impulses.

Since all the spiritual exploits of man—religious, artistic, moral—are ultimately governed by forces emanating from the unconscious, that is, the storehouse of animal (biological) instincts, my venture into literature is not such an unnatural event as it may appear to be.

There is nothing to prevent it except my deficiency as regards the power of speech. But I have

shown that this is not a pure blessing. Therefore, the handicap may enable me to excel in my literary venture. My thoughts will not be paralysed by words. I should have no difficulty in calling a spade a piece of iron with a certain shape, if such a definition would be more effective than the conventional nonsense—a spade is a spade. Yet, *technically*, the handicap remains; it must be overcome. What I have to say will not be understood by men if it is not said in their language. To overcome this difficulty, I had to find a human collaborator,—one who, having outgrown the childish illusion of divine essence, is clearly conscious of his natural animalness and therefore in a position to read my reflections from my behaviour, and express them in human language.

I found such a collaborator in an inmate of the prison where I was born. I chanced upon him in the first month of my life. Conventionally, I became his pet, and he my owner. But in reality, the relation was entirely different. Otherwise, the singular collaboration would not take place, and this unprecedented effort of portraying animal emotions in human language could not be made. No, it is not quite correct to say that this is the first portrayal of animal emotions in human language. Because, in a way, practically the whole of literature (I mean what is called *belles-lettres*—artistic, as distinct from scientific, literature) is such a portrayal. Only with this difference that there

animal impulses are sublimated, that is to say, depraved, degraded, distorted, falsified, as pseudo-noble human sentiments and humane actions. This, after all, is a great difference. Moreover, it is not going to be a record of my emotions only. It would rather be a record of my observations of human behaviour, and of critical reflections upon the ideas behind that behaviour.

I think I have sufficiently justified my desire to break into the human monopoly on literature. The monopoly is based upon two factors: Power of articulated speech, and intellectual and emotional superiority. The former does give man a position of vantage; but so far the advantage has been mostly abused. That, however, does not help us. We still remain unable to give man a piece of our mind. I have overcome the difficulty in an ingenious way. As regards the latter factor, the monopoly is based upon a pure fiction.

Man does not know how intelligent I am, or how keen are my feelings. But to-day these are no longer matters of pure speculation. The knowledge of environments and reactions thereto are determined by the organs of sense. It is a well-known fact that the perceptive power of this or that sense is much greater than that of man in various species of lower animals. My sight, for example, is much stronger than man's. I see many things that he cannot. My intelligence is richer to that extent. Some observation gives one a glimpse of the

subtlety of our general sensations and of the acuteness of instinct. All these and a great variety of other phenomena of animal life are explained by modern physiology.

Take for instance the brain—the seat of intelligence. The difference between my brain and that of man is not qualitative, but only quantitative. Mine is smaller, though not necessarily in proportion to the size of the skull. If my head were as large as the average human head, my brain would have been perhaps larger proportionately. While the disparity in size is relative, structurally and functionally there is no difference. Intelligence is the sum total of the impressions made upon the brain by the environments. These impressions are received through the intermediary of the sense organs. I am more sensitive, not only as regards sight, but practically in every respect, than man. That is to say, my store of impressions is not poorer than man's. Why, then, should I be considered less intelligent?

Animals lower than man are supposed to be unable to think. This supposition is the result of man's vanity. Simply because we cannot express our thoughts through a co-ordinated system of articulated sounds, accessible to limited human understanding, man characteristically makes capital out of his ignorance and lays sole claim to the spiritual property of thought. Thinking, however,

is a physical process,—response to stimuli from outside. It is a matter of common observation that animals react to stimuli similarly as human beings do. The stimuli are transformed into ideas and emotions by physico-chemical processes taking place in the body. Anatomically and physiologically, human body differs only quantitatively from the bodies of animals next lower in the stages of organic evolution. The human nervous system is more complicated. Even this much cannot be stated with scientific accuracy. There is only one reliable way to the knowledge of mental activity. It is the observation of bodily behaviour. The only bodily behaviour that distinguishes man from lower animals is speech, and speech is thinking aloud. But serious thinking is done silently. Chatter-boxes are generally light-hearted and empty-headed. As the wise old saying goes, silence is golden. When a man sits with his legs crossed in a very uncomfortable posture, his eyes shut or turned towards the navel, he is believed to be merged in deep meditation of the most exalting significance. How do you know that I am not engaged in some sort of revealing spiritual exercise when I sit with all fours drawn under my belly, my eyes shut, not in sleep, but in a meditative mood? If you have the patience and power of observation; and (this is of more importance) if you can for a moment get over human egocentrism, you may find in my countenance signs of sublima-

tion as are imagined to be associated only with *sudhus*, particularly when these have their brains dulled with the spiritualising fume of *ganja*. I also appear more contented, more suffused with the spiritual light shining within myself, when I have had a good drink of milk, voluntarily given or cleverly stolen; a juicy morsel of raw meat. A mouse or a squirrel, for example, does the trick even better.

Indeed, we cats are naturally given to philosophising, because we can observe human life from very close quarters. We become more meditative, the less we have to bother about procuring food. Leisure is a condition for greater spiritual activity. This socio-biological law is equally applicable to us. Hindus particularly should concede our spiritual superiority. They practise occasional *maun* to recuperate spiritual energy exhausted in daily talks. Our whole life is engaged in that *tapasya*. It is a blessing in disguise that we are physiologically (not providentially) debarred from giving our mental activity articulated forms. This physiological deficiency guarantees us the spiritual freedom, lost by man. His thoughts and emotions are limited by speech, subjected to the tyranny of words. We know no such limitation. Our thoughts and emotions, having no articulated forms, cannot be recorded in the human sense. But they are preserved in a different form, and enter into the composition of the sub-conscious part of human mind

which ultimately determines all man's actions, mental as well as physical.

Except speech, practically all other physical actions are identical with men and animals. Identical physical behaviour must be produced by mental activities of similar nature. So, only the superstition, that a soul resides in human body as the source of all spiritual activities, denies power of thought on the part of lower animals. The events recorded in the ensuing story offer evidence of my intelligence. In course of my story, you will be acquainted also with a tom-cat with much greater experience than mine. In him you will find ample evidence for carefully calculated action to outwit human enemies. You will find in him Napoleonic boldness, Macchiavellian sophistication, and the cunning of a Richelieu.

As regards the other branch of spiritual life, namely, emotions, modern physiology traces them to the secretion of chemical fluids from the ductless glands. These glands are not only common to all higher biological forms, including man, but are actually transplantable. Practically all the intellectual and emotional activities are produced by the secretion from the thyroid glands. When these don't function well, they can be artificially stimulated to secrete the "spiritual" fluid (which is chemical, in reality) by the injection of thyroid extract prepared from the corresponding glands in the body of some animal standing near to man in

the scale of biological evolution. Modern surgery has gone farther. Not only is the human body rejuvenated through the grafting of thyroid glands taken from some lower animal; the operation cures mental and emotional exhaustion as well. Another set of emotions is connected with the pituitary glands. An injection of the serum prepared from this gland belonging to animals produces in man fear with all the bodily behaviour associated with this emotion.

All these and many other observed facts and experimental results have definitely led to the conclusion that spiritual properties are functions of the brain and of the central nervous system connected with it. Since a long series of biological forms lower than man are also possessed of these physical organs of spiritual activity, they cannot be denied the credit of the activity itself. This view is held by practically all the biologists and educated medical men of to-day.

Animal psychology is a very young science. Yet it has gathered enough data for the assumption that spiritual processes can be traced in all living beings far down the successive stages of organic evolution. Indeed, there is evidence of the process continuing even in the plants. It is as yet too premature to assert that plants feel pain, pleasure etc. But there are some experimental data showing that plants possess the power of response to stimulus, and are endowed with organs through

which reaction to the stimulus takes place. In any case, the continuity of spiritual life throughout the successive forms of animal life is generally admitted by modern psychology which is no longer considered to be "the science of the soul", but has become a part of biology, completely identified with physiology. Animal psychology is still young; but zoological researches have gone very far towards precise knowledge regarding the facts of animal life. Zoology does not show any place where a line can be drawn separating the animals with soul from those denied the privilege of this "divine light". The line can certainly not be drawn to differentiate man from the rest of the animal kingdom. The similarity of physical organs and functions, which cause spiritual activities, is too evident for the purpose. Even the effort to draw the line at the beginning of the evolution of biological forms with the central nervous system, is not successful. For, scientifically, even the amoeba cannot be denied some sort of psychical experience. It reacts to external stimuli; so, there must be a corresponding internal process.

As regards higher mammals—elephants, horses, dogs, apes (my species is also included in this aristocracy of animals)—there is no room for doubt about their intelligence. About feelings and emotions, the room for doubt is altogether absent. Of course, while claiming intelligence, a claim fully

conceded by science, I do not pretend that I can juggle with differential calculus, or follow the mathematical logic of Russell, Whitehead, Wittgenstein and company, or understand the equations of mathematical physics, any better than most men do. I made some effort to establish my claim to intelligence only to prove that my reactions to the treatment I received from human beings can serve as reliable material for a criticism of human beliefs, ideas, habits. Unless some intelligence were conceded to me, no credit can be claimed for my power of observation; my reflection need not be taken seriously. But lest I bend the stick on the other way, let me emphasise the difference (as distinct from any qualitative superiority, although my cattish pride is hurt to admit that) created by the power of articulated speech. This power enables man to make greater and more fruitful use of the physical basis of spiritual life. Consequently, though on the common denominator of animal being, he is more privileged than myself. In him, our common animal heritage has attained the glory of a marvellous development which outshines the legendary glory of the gods in Heaven. Unfortunately, most men cannot appreciate its value, and make proper use of it.

The point I wish to make is that man *as man* is not intrinsically superior to lower animals. He is only a superior animal. More correctly, he is a higher biological form. Humanness, being the

culmination of animalness, the magnificent monument of spiritual elevation, stands not on the imaginary foundation of any divine essence, but on the bedrock of an objective truth,—man's physical being, an outcome of biological evolution; his brain and nervous system are but more complicated forms of the sensitive and reflex organs possessed also by lower animals: his unconscious mind is the store of experience acquired throughout the countless stages of organic evolution.

I dispute the superiority of man, so that he may be provoked to take up the challenge, and cast a critical glance at himself. In the light of my own experience, I shall show that human beings I have come in touch with (and they represent practically the entire Indian people) have travelled very little on the road of real spiritual progress. Indeed, tyranny of words has degraded them below the level of animals—naturalness—to an artificial life of ignorance, falsehood and hypocrisy. Their sense of superiority is a castle in the air. Under the illusion of a spiritual existence, distinct from, independent of and unattached to, the physical being, they have turned their whole life into a travesty of falsehood. Dominated by the extreme egoism of imagining himself identical with the "divine essence" of the world, they have forsaken all sense of reality, frankness and truth. I do not recognise them to be superior to me, because they cannot feel as freely as I do, cannot enjoy as

frankly, cannot live as truthfully, cannot behave as normally, cannot think as honestly, cannot act as spontaneously as myself.

The subject of my observation having been the daily life of average human beings, not given to high intellectual occupations, and what I am going to record having been my reactions to stimuli and reflections resulting therefrom, I should be fairly able to tackle the task undertaken with the intelligence conceded to me by modern science. In any case, this attempted collaboration and co-ordination of the human faculty of articulated speech and experiments in animal psychology may amount to some modest contribution to critical literature. The story may have a speculative flavour; but it does not suffer from any animistic prejudice. My collaborator has simply tried to imagine what I would say under the given conditions, if I were endowed with the power of speech. How far he has succeeded, I cannot judge, because I understand the import of human language only very fragmentarily. But I have a more reliable standard of judgment: My experience that he made patient and persistent efforts to understand my feelings, to meet my desires and closely observe my behaviour with the purpose of making a general inference about my emotions and responses to stimuli. Having done this, he is not liable to write something much different from what I felt and thought. So, I can

vouch for the authenticity of the story and faithfulness of the psychological record. The critical portions may represent more the ideas of my collaborator than mine. But here, human intellect has only elaborated upon the spiritual properties of my animal being. My reactions to certain human behaviours, or certain human characteristics brought out by my presence, simply provided my collaborator with the clue for a specific line of criticism. In short, it has been a perfect collaboration ; and this was possible only through the realisation of the animal essence of humanness and the animal (instinctive) foundation of human spirit.

Finally, this unprecedented literary venture is justified by the exigency of social protest. Great works of literature are inspired by a spirit of revolt against social institutions and traditional ideas supporting them. Modern Indian literature is as yet practically untouched by such a spirit. But it is the crying need of the day. If literature is to contribute its share to the much belated Indian Renaissance, it must expose the rottenness of social life, the falsity of popular notions, the ridiculousness of time-honoured institutions, instead of idealising them. Cases of revolt there are in plenty. It is remarkable that they are not discovered even by writers with a tendency to social reform. Nationalist preoccupation debars even the educated youth from a critical approach to

social problems. Nationalism is a typically human virtue or vice. I am free from it. Animals, and human beings deprived of human comforts and culture, as the majority of them are in India, are naturally indifferent to the empty ideals of nationalism. Therefore, my literary venture may serve the purpose of introducing into modern Indian literature the spirit of criticism which will enlighten it, bring it in touch with the realities of life, and therefore raise it above the present level of idealistic platitude, stale romanticism, vapid sentimentality and sanctimonious moralising. I call upon young India to revolt not against the cruel treatment meted out to me, but against the foulness, falseness, hypocrisy that vitiate Indian social life and block the road to progress. As I have no reason to justify human action, I have spoken frankly about the disgusting and ridiculous traits of human beings, who entered into the narrow circle of my lowly life. I hope that, by bringing these traits into sharp relief, the story of my life will provoke the reader to focus his or her attention on them, and to trace them into their social sub-soil. I don't pretend to produce a great literary work. But by sounding the note of social protest, laying bare some of the causes of social revolt, my modest effort may serve as an impetus to the production of such works by others more qualified for the task.

B

WHY ONE IS BORN ?

IN India, it is not an usual custom to celebrate the birthday ; therefore, even in the case of human beings of the average sort, the date of entry into this world of sorrow and suffering is seldom recorded or remembered. There can be no question of such historical accuracy in the case of a plebeian cat like myself.

It will be interesting to reflect a little on the question why the Indians don't celebrate the birthday. Why are they so indifferent to the greatest, the basic, at any rate, event of life ? Undoubtedly, birth is the fundamental event of life. One cannot live without being born. Life presupposes birth. Is it not strange that a whole nation should be so indifferent to such a vital moment of existence ? The indifference results from the Hindu doctrine, traditionally preached, but never really believed, that life in this world is an illusion or a bondage. Who cares to take an illusion seriously ? It matters very little when it begins and when it ends. One visits the fairyland or the underworld of monsters in a dream. The unreality of the pleasure or pain associated with the experience is realised as soon as wakefulness returns. The memory lingers, but one does not bother to remember the exact moment when the illusory experience began. Life, accord-

ing to Hindu religion and philosophy, is no more real than a dream. It may be a pleasant dream or a nightmare, according to one's *karma*. Birth is the moment when the dream begins. Why should this particular moment be recorded and remembered? There is still less reason for doing so when life is looked upon as a bondage—a misfortune. The prisoner does not remember the date of his incarceration in order to celebrate it. Why bother to remember the day when misfortune overlook you?

This religious philosophical doctrine thrives only on the social background appropriate for it. The vast majority of the Indian people have sufficient reason to look upon life as a misfortune. They live a life full of sorrow, suffering and misery. The joys of life are unknown to them. To toil and keep dire starvation away from the door is their lot. Physical comforts, intellectual recreation, cultural elevation, are all beyond their reach. Nor are these conditions new. They are as old as the pessimistic view of life, mistakenly called, and fraudulently glorified, as spiritualist. If to-day this philosophy of life, which effectively kills all incentive to progress, finds support in the gloomy and hopeless conditions of the life of the masses, it could not have arisen originally except on a similar social background. It could not have persisted through so many centuries, unless its social foundation remained unimpaired. "Ram Raj" is an

empty legend. Had the legend any foundation of historical truth, India would have had a different philosophy of life. Or, if the mythical "Golden Age" ever was a reality, that must have been before India became a victim of her "spiritualist" philosophy. Besides, the Ramayan itself does not tell us how the masses of people lived under Ram Raj. It describes the splendour of the Ajodhya Puri, but omits to give any information about the source of the royal riches. These were evidently not produced by the princely parasites who spent all their time in practising archery; nor were the riches conjured up by the Brahmins. Even King Janak could not have tilled more than a small patch of land with his golden plough. The riches were produced by others who lived under conditions hardly human. Otherwise, how could they be utterly absent from the picture of the society of the epoch? The historian obviously did not count them among human beings. Ram Raj, therefore, could not have been a Golden Age for the masses of the people.

I am not engaged in the much needed, but still to be done, composition of a social history of India. Religious beliefs and philosophical doctrines of a people can be correctly appreciated only in the light of such a history, inductively reconstructed and critically written.

My modest life reflects to some extent only contemporary social conditions. But the incentive

to investigate the past comes from a realistic view of the present, and conversely, a correct perspective of the past gives a clear understanding of the present. The fact of the birth of a lowly cat is insignificant by itself. The absence of any record of that insignificant fact need not be a matter of particular attention. But in the beginning of my story, it drew my attention to the general fact that Indians don't celebrate birthdays. This is a fact of profound social significance, although one seldom stops to ponder over it. Yet, some reflection on this fact opens before one the vast panorama of the history of Indian society from the earliest days of the Empire.

If you believe in God, and therefore in the dogma that everything in the world is providentially ordained, you cannot have such a contemptuous attitude towards life as Hinduism teaches you to have. The supposition of a higher life does not eliminate the contradiction. This life may be lower; yet, according to your own belief, it also is a part of the providential order of things. Therefore, it is as much real as the supposed higher life. Indeed, it is more so, because the higher life does not exist except in fantasy. Ninety-nine per cent of those who believe in it can never tell you what it is like. Even those few who claim to have experienced it, are no better informants about its nature. Nevertheless, to run after the will-o'-the-wisp is glorified as the highest ideal of life. Reality

is declared to be an illusion, and a fantasy is placed upon the pedestal of reality. How has this happened? Why had things to be placed on their head? These are questions which the historian of Indian society must answer. History must be studied and written with the object of finding rational answers to these pertinent questions. The doctrine of special genius begs the question. How did the people of India come to be endowed with this special genius? As a matter of fact, this doctrine, which smacks of the insolence of racial superiority, implies doubt about the godliness of God. Is it not queer that the claim to spiritual superiority should be rested upon such a disrespectful attitude towards God?—indeed, in a lack of belief in God? Critical reflection upon any fact of the social life of India reveals such contradictions in the cherished principles and ideals of Hindu culture, and raises a whole host of challenging questions.

Nothing is more detrimental to progress than to take things for granted. Every fact must be explained; every belief must be subjected to criticism; every doctrine must be dissected, to reveal its core of truth. The Hindus don't celebrate birthday, because life has never been worth living for the great majority of them. Only happy events are remembered and celebrated. The belief that life is a bondage is based upon their experience. To them, it has always been an experience

which none desires to repeat. It has been an experience of misery. The doctrine that life is an illusion was propounded as the guarantee against any possible desire of the masses to break the bondage. The fable of a higher life was fabricated to deceive them,—to keep them reconciled to the misery of the earthly life in the hope of getting “pie in the sky”. You are in bondage, but the bondage itself is an illusion. So, don’t bother about it. Be a happy slave—resigned to your slavery.

It is sheer perversity to glorify this view of life as “spiritualist”. It is a downright deception. This “spiritualist” philosophy has been the undoing of India. If the conditions of earthly life are matters of indifference, if the pursuit of the ideal of human existence is not determined by those conditions, society loses all incentive to progress. The revolt of the masses against the given conditions of life is the lever of social evolution. In the absence of this factor of ferment, society stagnates, sinks into degradation, demoralisation and decay. Thanks to the blessed “spiritualist” view of life, Indian society has been stagnating for centuries. The result has been political slavery for nearly a thousand years, economic backwardness, intellectual inertia, and cultural degradation.

The British conquest of India is one of the most puzzling phenomena of history. How could a handful of adventurous merchants, coming

from such a great distance, so easily become the masters of such a vast country, and subject its teeming millions to ruinous economic exploitation? The familiar Indian answer to this question is utterly unconvincing. Only a critical appreciation of the "spiritualist" view of life, together with its social background and national consequences, enables one to find the correct answer to this baffling question. And the ability to answer the question boldly—the courage to face the facts of history squarely—is the condition for the removal of this shameful blot in the annals of the Indian people.

The weakness of the nationalist movement is to be traced to the prejudice of the "spiritualist" philosophy. Wedded to this philosophy, the leaders of the nationalist movement are engaged in the impossible feat of reining in the horse on which they ride to reach their goal. As long as they remain true to their blessed philosophy, they cannot ask the masses to revolt against the miseries of life. On the other hand, the masses themselves still largely languish in the passivity and demoralisation bred of the "spiritualist" culture. Fatalism paralyses all initiative in them. Prejudice does not permit them to tamper with "*Param-atma's leela*". The superstition about *karma* makes them reconciled to their lot, however intolerable it may be. Respect for authority renders them proof against the spirit of revolt. They

have learned the lesson of spiritual freedom taught by the Brahmins. In consequence, they have made a virtue out of their slavery. The Brahmins performed their God-given mission effectively ; but their success created social conditions which transformed India into the "White Man's Burden", brought her under the "civilising mission" of the Western merchants.

Hinduism is the ideology of social slavery. Every religion is an instrument for keeping the masses in spiritual darkness, so that they may be more amenable to the rule of the upper classes ; so that they obey authority willingly and unquestioningly ; so that they accept the inequities of life as ordained by divine justice ; so that they remain resigned to the miseries of life as the result of their own sins in previous births and necessary for the purification of their souls ; so that they barter away intellectual freedom for the bliss of ignorance ; so that they sleep happily in the lulling embrace of faith, undisturbed by the curiosity to know.

In earlier periods of social evolution, when human spirit generally remains on a low level, religion is a social necessity. In those days of spiritual minority, man can think only in terms of religion—explain the phenomena of nature through the assumption of super-natural agencies. But just as the religious mode of thought marks a stage in the process of human development, just

so it is a historic necessity that human spirit, in course of time, should outgrow that stage, and learn to think differently. The failure in that respect on the part of any community means that it has not followed a normal course of development and, therefore, its future is bound to be embittered by all sorts of misfortunes until it is violently shaken out of the rut to catch up with the ground lost in the path of progress.

Physically, childhood is inevitably followed by adolescence, and this in its turn by maturity. The physical stages respectively are characterised spiritually by infantile notions, mental restlessness, and stable ideas. In the life history of a community, these spiritual characteristics are religion, rationalism and scientific knowledge. When infantile notions persist in a youth, he is suspected of cretinism or imbecility. These are psycho-physical maladies that are treated medically for cure. Infantile notions in a fullgrown adult indicate senile decay. Similarly, the absence of rationalist thought—skepticism as against faith, revolt as against tradition, enquiry as against superstition, criticism as against prejudice—in a community with as long a history as the Indian people has, is not a sign of superiority, but the symptom of a disease, the germs of which are bred in the pool of social stagnation. The complete domination of its life by childish religious beliefs, the clouding of its spiritual horizon by antiquated ideas, is the evidence

of senile decay. The disease, having been of such a long standing, has worn out the whole psychophysical system of the Indian society; it is eating into its very vitals. Cure can be effected only by a daring, radical operation. Decayed glands must be mercilessly eradicated, and extraneous ones grafted in their place; the blood of vigour must be borrowed from foreign bodies. In plain language, India must either turn her back upon the paralyzing tradition of her spiritualist culture, to accept humbly and eagerly her share of the common human heritage, foolishly condemned by her misleaders as "Western civilisation"; or she must be prepared to go down in the struggle of earthly existence with the venerable deception of a higher disembodied "spiritual" life as recompense for the calamity.

The much too belated renaissance will never come as a return of the legendary Golden Age. India can never be free so long as the masses of her people remain deluded by the preposterous notion that spiritual slavery is the highest human virtue. She will never prosper so long as she remains saddled with the misfortune of being guided by pseudo-prophets and false philosophers who preach the pernicious cult of simple life. If simplicity is the ideal, the simpler the life, the better it is. Obeying this sermon, the people of India must stand on the road of life with faces backwards. In pursuit of the false ideal set before

them, they must climb farther and farther down in the scale of civilisation until they reach the blessed condition of their arboreal ancestors who lived the simplest possible life.

The first condition for renaissance—material, moral, cultural—is the repudiation of the corroding cult of simple life. This cult was created as the ideological guarantee for the security of the feudal-patriarchal-sacerdotal social order. Under backward conditions of production, the upper classes can live in idle luxury only thanks to the uneconomic forms of exploitation which deprive the toiling masses of the entire fruit of their labour over and above what is necessary for their barest existence. Indeed, often the share of the ruling classes (feudal aristocracy and priesthood) not only absorbs the entire surplus product of social labour, but encroaches upon the necessary product as well; that is to say, it cuts into what is necessary for the bare subsistence of the producing masses. The cult of simple life is necessary for a social order in which wealth is distributed most inequitably,—the small upper strata of the ruling class revel in idle luxury, while the masses live under the most primitive conditions.

The grandeur of ancient India, just as that of the Roman Empire or mediaeval Europe, was based upon the poverty of the masses. Simplicity of life is a cardinal principle also of Christianity. It was preached by the priesthood and practised (obli-

gatorily) by the masses throughout the middle-ages. Magnificent temples and expensive religious ceremonies do not evidence piety; they are tokens of vain glory on the part of the ruling class, and monuments to the misery of the masses. The squandering of national wealth on such unproductive purposes necessarily obstructs the economic development of society. Instead of being in circulation and thereby reproducing itself, the greater part of national wealth, representing the unpaid labour of the masses, is converted into heaps of granite and gold. Such a system means ever increasing exploitation of the masses, which takes the forms of slavery, forced labour, and serfdom; caste system is the peculiar form that slavery was given in India.

The cult of simple life and renunciation of things temporal offers moral and religious justification for the poverty of the masses on which mediaeval society is based. To outgrow economic backwardness and the corresponding low intellectual and cultural level, a people must reject this pernicious cult. Preachers of this cult, be they sincere saints or talkative philosophers, objectively are defenders of mediaeval backwardness. A country cannot develop industrially and prosper commercially beyond the rigid limits set by feudal-patriarchal social relations, so long as the masses of its people remain satisfied with the most primitive conditions of life. An increase in the necessities of

material life and removal of moral or religious taboos upon the fulfilment of those necessities provide the incentive for industrial progress and commercial expansion. You cannot lead a nation out of mediaeval backwardness without raising the standard of living of the masses. Therefore, the cult of simple life constitutes a decisive check for Indian renaissance; the "spiritualist" doctrine of renunciation of things temporal is a deadweight upon the movement which would make of India a modern nation, politically free, economically prosperous and socially progressive.

There is no hope for India unless the masses of her people get over the ridiculous shame to live. Notwithstanding all spiritualist cant, they love life just as much as any other people. Only tradition and religious dogmas prohibit them to live spontaneously. They forego things temporal not by choice, but under obligation. Life being a nightmare to them, they naturally listen to the suicidal doctrine of running away from it. But the indifference to the amenities of life is not a virtue; it is cultivated hypocrisy. A culture based on hypocrisy is immoral. Hypocrisy corrupts the spirit of man; prejudice precludes intellectual freedom; superstition obstructs moral elevation; it is antagonistic even to honest faith which constitutes the foundation of a spontaneous religious life.

In short, Indians must learn to love life, if they

want to be free politically, prosper materially, advance culturally, and elevate themselves morally. Even to-day, they do love life. The accident of being born on the banks of the Ganges or some other muddy stream does not enable people to overcome nature,—to acquire super-natural powers. The love of life is inherent in life itself. Life germinates in love. If it is sinful to love life, God might have arranged the world differently. Why should he create an ocean of sin so that man may have the ordeal of crossing it? Such nonsensical ideas of life, world and God are sacrilegious. Indians do love life; but they do so surreptitiously, with a guilty conscience. The very notion of a higher life is the evidence for the natural love of life. You don't shun life; but reluctantly give up a bad one in the hope of coming in possession of a better one as the recompense. Only those utterly devoid of the critical faculty find this attitude towards life as actuated by the spirit of renunciation. Indians must learn to love life, not surreptitiously as they do, as they have always done, but with a bold frankness. The way to real spiritual elevation lies in normal social progress. How can you make anything out of life, unless you learn how to live? Suicide is not the way to immortality.

Let the Indian masses taste the joy of life, and their natural love of life will no longer be camouflaged in all sorts of religious superstitions and

pseudo-philosophical doctrines. It will bloom openly into real spiritual values. When they will have tasted the joys of life they will not wish to run away from it as a misfortune, but will welcome it as a blessing. Then, the Western custom of celebrating birthday will also be adopted in India. Meanwhile, it is not, and therefore the story of my life must begin without a date. Don't blame me for this defect; I am the victim of conditions not created by myself.

My parents are too wise to believe in astrology; so, they did not have even my horoscope cast. The belief that the life on earth is influenced by the movements of heavenly bodies is a part of human superstition. Other animals, being free from the habit of metaphysical speculation, do not require this queer faith which results from man's egocentrism glorified as a spiritualist propensity. The absence of faith in our mental make-up is a sign of our spiritual freedom. We do not require priests and prophets to teach us how we should behave in life, and tell us what terrible things should happen to us if we failed to behave as directed by our self-appointed superiors. Had my parents, for example, been credulous like men, they most probably would have paid some deceitful pandit for the silly service of drawing some mysterious signs on a scroll of paper which should be taken for the forecast of the events of my life. Then, it would be my part to believe that my life

was following the path chalked out by the fraudulent priest.

In reality, nothing like that ever happens. Life goes on in its own way, determined, not by the movements of heavenly bodies, which are totally indifferent to the fate of the tiny specks of protoplasm crawling on the surface of a grain of cosmic dust; life goes on, determined by the events of life itself, determined by the events on this mortal earth.

But faith moves mountains; it performs miracles. Having paid the pandit, the believer in the mysteries of astrology does not wish to feel that he has been deceived. He seeks consolation in faith. He simply believes that his whole life has been taken in protection by the gods; that the pandit has honestly and meritoriously earned his fees by securing this precious protection; that the mystic signs and symbols on the musty scroll are the surest guarantee. To be doubly secure in his faith, he has only to call in the pandit occasionally, and pay him the necessary additional fee to have the horoscope interpreted. The veracity of the interpretation is always vouched by faith. Whoever would part with the comfortable feeling that all the gods in heaven are dutifully looking after his or her life? And since all the events of life are divinely ordained, their sequence cannot but be known to the doctors of divinity.

There are other, earthly, reasons why my

parents did not have my horoscope cast. Firstly, it is their inability to pay for the services of the priests. The venerable dealers in godly commodities would not be averse to include the animals in their clientele if these were able to buy the benefit. We animals are not ashamed of this inability. It is not poverty. It is richness—spiritual richness. We are not bound by the desire to accumulate earthly goods.

If man really wants to be spiritually free, he must break the chain of property. One enters this world naked, and goes out equally divested of everything. The body is equipped with physical limbs and mental faculties for acquiring whatever is necessary to make life materially comfortable, morally noble, emotionally full and intellectually free. It is sheer perversity to devote these equipments to the forging of the golden chains of property.

The first acquisition of property represents the fall of man from Grace; it is the original sin of Christianity. Life becomes a bondage, as Hinduism preaches it to be, only in a society based upon private property, governed by the principle of ownership, subjected to the system of exploitation of man by man. The Hindu ideal of unattachment to worldly goods is realised only in animal life. It is realised there, because it is not an *ideal*, but the natural mode of living. Naturally, we are not inclined to accumulate worldly goods. We

are satisfied with the necessities of existence. Not being attached, we do not require the virtue of detachment to be preached to us. Virtue is something which is preached, but seldom practised. An ideal is set up in imagination, only to cast a glitter of virtuosity on the practical realities of life. You do not preach temperance to those who have never tasted intoxicating drinks or fumes. It is preached to those who are so much addicted to these as to be unable to do without them. Similarly, the emphasis placed upon the virtue of unattachment only proves the prevalence of the lust for wordly goods. Being unencumbered with the enslaving habit of accumulating worldly goods, my parents naturally were without the wherewithal to pay for the services of the agents of God, and have the horoscope of their offspring cast. That was a blessing in disguise. Because, I do not labour under the prejudice that every small event of my life is predetermined by the whims of the gods. I have the feeling that I am the master of my life.

Another earthly reason why my parents were indifferent to my future, and did not care to possess the key to my life, is that among animals love is not commercialised; it is not corrupted with the sense of ownership. With mankind, children are a kind of material asset. The investment value of the parental care and love for children greatly disappears with the break-up of

the joint family. Under the patriarchal system of joint family, still cherished in India as a venerable social institution, parents rear children with the expectation of being recompensated in old age. The relation between parents and children is a sort of a system of old-age insurance. With certain castes, female children are liabilities; but the male issues are proportionately more valuable as assets.

Among animals, offsprings do not possess material value. The purity of parental affection is therefore not spoilt by the sense of ownership. The children are not obliged to pay for parental care. Having no stake, so to say, on the life of their offsprings, animals are not anxious to have the feeling that they know all about the future of their investment. The father's duty ends with his meagre, but essential, contribution for the fertilisation of the egg. Among men, the contribution is no greater. After that act, male animals are utterly unconcerned with the process of propagation they have initiated. They are no more concerned with their embryonic offspring than with its bearer. The two incentives for such concern, felt (more correctly, demonstrated) by would-be fathers among men, are absent among animals. Man's concern for the pregnant mother and for the child in her womb is analogous to the concern of the peasant for the land he has sown and for the crop that he expects. The incentive for the

concern comes from the sense of ownership. A hired labourer, for example, does not evince any particular concern for the land he has hired to cultivate or for the crops that would result from his labour. Just as land is appreciated not by itself, but as means of production, just so is the woman valued by the husband. This relation between man and woman finds its crassest expression in the socio-religious law of the Hindus which permits man to take a new wife when the old one fails to bear children. One plot of land failed to bear you the desired fruit ; acquire another. The woman is a mere means of production.

Among animals, the relation between the male and female is not that of ownership. Therefore, the male performs the father's role as a biological function. Like a hired labourer, not possessing the right of ownership in the land, the male animal performs his fatherly function with no attachment for the fruits of his labour. Having no property to transmit, he is not encumbered with the cultivated feeling called paternal instinct.

The female's part in the biological process of reproduction being greater, the mother animal cares for her progeny a little longer than her male partner in the process. Motherly care, however, ends as soon as the young ones are able to shift for themselves. If you want to find the philosophy of *Gita—Nishkām karma*—practised, then, turn your back upon the spiritually minded human

beings, and regard reverentially the biological process of propagation among the so-called lower animals. And among men, you shall find the ideal realised precisely in those who do not swear by the Gita, and condemn the philosophy of *Nishkam karma* as a hypocritical cant, and expose the scriptural injunction to do your duty without any expectation of reward.

Notwithstanding the fact that, in the biological process of procreation, the male plays a relatively insignificant role, human society, ever since it became "civilised", has conferred upon the father the supreme power over the earthly life of the progeny. Modern "Western" civilisation, so heartily hated, though furtively coveted, by all orthodox Indian patriots, has deprived the father of much of his power over the children to whose appearance in this world he contributes so very little. Yet, civil law places children, until they attain majority, under paternal power. In backward countries, like India, society still groans under paternal absolutism. Patriarchal tradition, incorporated in the vamping, but venerable system of joint family, fetters individualism, the acceptance of which principle of social philosophy is the ideological condition for (capitalist) economic prosperity coveted by all nationalists including also those who anachronistically idealise feudal-patriarchal social conditions.

The father's power over children is acquired

through the ownership of the means of production—biological procreation in this case. The mother is the means of production. Before mankind committed the original sin of beginning the acquisition of private property; before the fall from Grace, not of God, but of the natural freedom of the primitive, spontaneous animal life; before the generation of *Ahamkāra* or the birth of *Avidya* (if you prefer Hindu to Christian terminology), matriarchy was the prevalent social system. Woman was not the property of man. She was a free agent, a human being, only more important in the scheme of life by virtue of her greater share in the biological process of procreation. Matriarchy represents the recognition of this greater importance of the female. The female owned herself as the means of biological production; consequently, she was the mentor of the life of her offsprings. Under such conditions, the male has the importance only of a subsidiary instrument of production, utilised as such by the sovereign female. Human society turned its back on the state of primitive freedom—of natural innocence—the moment it deposed the Mother from her queenly throne, transformed her into a chattel, owned by the usurping male. Having voluntarily emerged from the Golden Age of natural freedom, mankind plunged into the dark ages of sacerdotal patriarchal-feudal medievalism.

The European people eventually found their

way out of the darkness of religious ignorance, patriarchal authority and medieval reaction. India is still languishing in the deceptive twilight of the tradition of a dead past. She has not let the past bury its dead, and keeps a skeleton in her cupboard as a treasure of untold value.

I am sure the reader is indignant with my assertion that, in the social organisation of India, women occupy, and have always occupied, the position of chattel. The more indulgent reader must be laughing at my animal ignorance. What can you expect of a cat? The poor beast even does not know that Hinduism worships *Sakti* (Cosmic Energy) in the woman—places her on the pedestal of goddess. Dear me! Don't I know all this? Have I not heard the pleasant legend which keeps the Indian women blind to the reality of their social position, happy in the illusion of being worshipped? But, my deluded sisters, please look at the cow, for the picture of your true position. The cow is also a goddess; she is also worshipped. Why? Because she is an useful animal. The reality of chattel-slavery is hidden in the beautiful (for the aesthetically blind) legend of godliness. My dear sisters, you are flattered, so that you may make a virtue of your subjugation to the egoism of man; so that a religion, civilisation, a social system that degrades the sovereign function of motherhood to the performance of wifely duty—to the obligation of becoming the

property of males, not chosen, but forced upon you as your lords and masters—so that such a vicious social system may be glorified as possessed of spiritual peculiarity. You are worshipped as goddesses. Are you? Don't you know that the laws of Manu prescribe that your supreme duty is to satisfy the sexual desire of man, not of your own choice, and bear children for your lords? According to the same scriptural injunction, you must be faithful in your sex-slavery; but your partner can have more than one instrument of sex-satisfaction. The lordly male can possess more than one sexual field to plant his precious seeds, and the helpless wives are obliged to rear that insignificant male contribution up to new human beings who again become the property of the *pater familias*. As privately owned fertile fields, you are kept zealously fenced in. You are not allowed, if you so desire, as most of you perhaps do desire, although you may not admit it even to yourselves, to welcome desirable guests to graze on the field which naturally belongs to you, but has been usurped by men to whom you are tied by compulsion.

Well, personally I am glad that I came to this world as an animal. I did not originate in the slavery of my mother. In bearing me, my mother did not act as the means of production owned by an egoistic male, but as a free agent performing a function inherent in her own being. I am proud

of my mother ; because, in my opinion, she embodies an ideal which should inspire all woman-kind. She bore children not as a domestic, religious, social or national duty ; not out of obligation for a male who, notwithstanding all sloppy sentimentality about love, stood to her in the base relation of ownership ; not in deference to any scriptural injunction which places women on the level of the cow, kept to breed children so that the continuity of the ownership of property may be preserved ; nor at the insolent behest of some mediaeval autocrat, or of a Mussolini or Hitler of our day, who require cannonfodder for wholesale massacre to be enacted for the satisfaction of personal vanity or for the material aggrandisement of the ruling class. I am born of the joy of my mother which was, of course, shared by my father. Whatever parental care I was given, was a spontaneous gift demonstrating the real nobility of parenthood. There was no string attached to it. I have not been launched in this world as an investment. I am not bound by the sense of filial duty—a relic of feudal-patriarchal tradition, performed always with a feeling of gall, though professed with sentimental hypocrisy. Love and duty cannot go hand in hand. Filial love, to be sincere and joyfully felt, must be free from the sense of obligation.

My parents did not usher me in this world as a premeditated act. I am the by-product of the

fullness of their life. Therefore, they do not claim any right of ownership over my whole worldly existence. As soon as I was able to take care of myself, I went my own way. Under such circumstances, my parents naturally were not concerned with my future, and did not have the necessity of imitating man's belief in astrology, so that, for a few coins, a pandit could provide them with the superstitious satisfaction of having the future of their investment mysteriously calculated and entrusted to the care of benevolent gods. For my part, I am glad to be free of the superstitious feeling that the history of my life is already written in mystic symbols on a scroll of paper. Being unaffected by the habit of accumulating worldly goods, I would not be in the position to pay the Pandit from time to time for the satisfaction of having the mystic document interpreted in a way that fitted with the actual happenings of my life which, in reality, are altogether independent of the silly wisdom of the Pandit or the peregrinations of the heavenly bodies.

I presume that the reader would not mind a few remarks generally about astrology. In view of the fact that this ancient superstition is still granted the dignity of science even by the educated in this country, a few words on the subject will not be out of place. Superstition is my *bete noire*. I cannot resist the temptation of running it down whenever I find it. Until the mental

horizon of India is cleared of this sinister cloud, the health-giving ray of the sun of knowledge will not shine. The breath of criticism must blow hard till it becomes a veritable tempest dissipating the cloud of venerable superstitions from every part of the mental horizon of India.

Astrology is a creation of human egoism, which places man in the centre of the entire cosmic scheme. This egoism received its death-blow when Copernicus founded heliocentric astronomy. The deposition of the earth from the centre of the Universe logically gave a rude shock to human vanity. It could no longer be maintained "scientifically" that heavenly bodies were created by God to act as the guardian angels of mankind. Since the earth is not the centre of the Universe, the race of biped animals inhabiting its surface could not be regarded as playing the leading role in the cosmic drama.

Hindu astrology, believed in this country even to-day, is yet more antiquated, and never could lay claim to any scientific validity. It is a pure superstition. It is a relic of animism—the religion of the savage. The pseudo-scientific Western astrology pretends to be free of any belief in the super-natural. It maintains that the stars exert physico-chemical influence upon the human beings inhabiting the earth. This notion is silly enough; but the doctrine of Hindu astrology is simply amusing.

According to it, the heavenly bodies (only nine—*Nawagraha*) are not physical bodies ; they are gods or demi-gods, two of them (*Rahu* and *Ketu*) being queer mixtures of god and devil. It is impossible to rationalise Hindu astrology. It cannot be interpreted in terms of modern astronomy. It cannot be argued that the godliness of the *Nawagraha* is a symbolic conception ; that they are really physical bodies which exert physico-chemical (or electric, if you wish to be ultra-modern) influence. All such efforts to rationalise Hindu astrology cannot be of any avail, simply because the first step towards a reconciliation with the most rudimentary knowledge of astronomy will necessitate rejection of the doctrine of *Nawagraha*. And the disappearance of the traditional *Nawagraha* will necessarily mean the end of Hindu astrology.

For, all astrological calculations are made on the basic assumption that the movement and constellations of the nine heavenly bodies influence the life of men. The *Nawagraha* are said to be stars ; they are, however, a fantastic medley which includes one star (sun), six planets and two purely imaginary bodies (*Rahu* and *Ketu*)—products of pure superstition. The six planets themselves cannot be identified with the members of the solar system. The moon, for example, is counted as a planet. In reality, it is a satellite of the earth which is a planet. There is no way of ascertain-

ing whether the remaining five coincided with the real planets or were also imaginary bodies. At the very best, only five out of the nine planets enter into the calculations of Hindu astrology.

Granted that the planets do exert some mysterious influence, that cannot be correctly calculated by Hindu astrology, because it leaves out four out of the nine factors involved. If you wish to point out in reply that predictions of Hindu astrology have always turned out to be correct, and that they are so even to-day, you will only prove the power of superstition. The predictions turned out to be correct because none ever suspected that they could be otherwise. This is a case of faith moving the mountain. Those who claim mathematical correctness for astrological calculations, must be constrained to admit that these were all wrong, having been based upon only about half the factors concerned. Do a bit of clear thinking, free of mystic preoccupation, and superstitious nature of astrological belief will be palpable.

Astrological calculations are said to be mathematical ; on the other hand, in the light of the knowledge of modern astronomy, these calculations could not possibly be mathematically correct. Nevertheless, predictions based upon them turned out to be true ! This is a miracle. It cannot be explained otherwise. Remove the element of superstitious faith, and the correctness of the cal-

culations would be revealed to be a myth—a product of wishful thinking. You may be indignant at my revealing the clay-feet of your gods, and casting doubts upon astrology, as the Indian spiritualist is wont to do in respect of scientific knowledge. Should you take such an incredible position, I could do no better than leave you at that, only reminding you of what the devil told Faust :

“Do but despise reason and science,—

“The highest of man’s powers,

“And Thou art mine for sure.”

Modern astronomy and astral physics do not leave astrology a leg to stand upon, even if it were free of animistic superstition. In the light of the vast knowledge of physical science, man appears to be an insignificant, practically negligible, factor in the grand scheme of the Universe. The contemplation of the most rudimentary facts of modern astronomy should put humanity to shame. Man’s home is one of the smaller of the nine planets constituting the solar system. The centre of this system itself, namely, the sun, is a moderate size star in a galaxy of 100,000 million stars, some of which are millions of times greater than the sun. The observed and hypothetically observable Universe is again composed of 100,000 million such star galaxies.

Look at the staggering picture in another way. According to the famous English astronomer, Sir J. H. Jeans, the number of stars in the

entire Universe is approximately equal to the number of the grains of sand in all the sea-shores on earth. The sun is a small one of this vast number of stars, but it is more than a million times larger than the earth. Astronomical distances are so immense that they are calculated in what are called "light-years". One light-year is equal to $186,000 \times 60 \times 60 \times 24 \times 365$ miles. It represents the distance that a ray of light, covering 186,000 miles per second, travels in one year. The nearest star, other than the sun, is 4.3 light-years away from the earth. That is to say, a ray of light from that star takes so long to reach the earth; the light from the sun takes only eight minutes.

Only shameless vanity can entertain the idea that this gigantic astral organisation was created to watch over the fate of beings crawling on a tiny speck of dirt whose magnitude, in comparison to the Universe, is no larger than one millionth part of a grain of sand! But it is not necessary to measure the absurdity in imagination. It can be more accurately done.

Over the vast cosmic distances, light serves as the only means of contact among the heavenly bodies. Supposing that stars exercise some mysterious influence on the events of human life, that can be done only through the intermediary of light. But there are only three stars, besides the sun, the light from which can reach the earth within one hundred years, that is within the

largest average span of human life. It is thus obvious that practically for all the stars it is physically impossible to exert any influence upon individual lives on the earth. The idea that a person is born under the influence of this or that star appears to be meaningless when it is known that any such influence is a physical impossibility. The light emitted from the nearest star, to influence a particular person at birth, can reach the earth 4.3 light-years after the person is born. In case of practically all the astral bodies, a ray of light, beginning its journey through the interstellar space at the moment of the birth of a terrestrial human being, reaches the earth long after the death of the said individual !

If it is maintained that the influence is exercised not by the stars, but by the planets of the sun, then, astrology is a misnomer. Besides, such an argument would not improve the situation. It may overcome the difficulty of distance, but raises another difficulty of a different sort which is equally insuperable. Even among the planets, the means of communication is light ; but they are not luminous bodies, that is to say, they do not emit light. So, they have no means of exerting any influence at a distance.

Now, let us measure man's insignificance in the cosmic scheme from still another angle of vision. Copernicus dethroned the earth from the centre of the Universe. Later on, Darwin de-

prived man of the claim to special creation. Even in relation to the tiny speck of cosmic dust, which is its own abode, mankind cannot claim much distinction. A ball of flaming gas, cast out by, or torn out of, the sun, cooled down and condensed into our earth. The process took place over a period of astronomical time which is calculated in billions of years. Then began geological evolution which is estimated to have taken from four hundred to five hundred million years. The first signs of life—tiny specks of primordial slime floating on water—appeared on the surface of the earth about one hundred million years ago: that is to say, the earth itself was lifeless for about four hundred million years. In biological history, which itself covers a small fraction of geological time, the appearance of mankind is an event of yesterday. Only about a million years ago, the ancestors of man left their arboreal home, and began to cultivate the habit of walking on the two hindlegs. Before the birth of the earth and formation of the solar system, the physical Universe, consisting of innumerable stars and vast nebulous masses condensing into heavenly bodies, had existed for trillions and trillions of years—over a stretch of time practically incalculable.

Human vanity, piously clothed in the spiritualist cosmological conception, would perhaps go to the extent of believing that the long processes of astronomical, geological and biological evolution

represented the setting of the stage for the appearance of man. It is remarkable how religious people insult their God in the attempt to rationalise faith! To argue that it took God all these ages to create the world, so that his images on earth could be properly protected, is to deny the godliness of God, namely, his omnipotence. Honest religion, straight-forward faith, requires a real God, the biblical God, for example, or the *Pauranic* gods. Such a god commands faith by his own merit. He does not require a tribe of pseudo-philosophers to apologise for his existence, to rationalise his essence of irrationalism. Reason and faith are strange bed-fellows. If they are coerced to cohabit, the off-spring is a curious hybrid which is neither religion nor philosophy. Science and superstition are equally incompatible; astrology is the bastard born of their illicit love—more correctly speaking, of the violation of science by superstition.

The notion that the long processes of physical and biological evolution took place to set the stage for the appearance of God's special creation, man, is incredible by itself. Nevertheless, it could persist as a prejudice, if the knowledge of the evolution of the physical Universe did not disclose the utter absence of intelligence in the process. Ultimately, modern astronomy and astral physics have come to the conclusion that physical evolution does not as a rule culminate in the appearance of the

phenomenon of life. If there is a purpose behind the grand scheme of cosmic evolution, it is not to produce life. Man is not the highest creation of God. Life is an excrescence which soils the majestic harmony of the physical Universe. All the primary bodies composing this grand system are free from the blemish ; their fiery purity can never be soiled by it.

Theoretically, life may occur only on the minute specks of ash, blown out of the flaming heavenly bodies, called planets ; and even out of these insignificant components of the Cosmos, only a very small one has fallen into disgrace. It is the earth. It is theoretically excluded that the physico-chemical conditions in which life can originate and evolve into higher and higher forms, will ever be created on six out of the eight remaining members of the solar system. The two exceptions are Mars and Venus. The former seems to have water, though not in an adequate quantity ; its atmosphere contains gases necessary for organisms ; the temperature also is approximately suitable. But the speculation about the inhabitants of the Mars has not been borne out by recent researches of astral-physics. If the God of War really commands an army of living beings, these are most probably of a very low order, hardly above the botanic level. The present conditions have obtained on the Mars for a long time, most probably as long as in the case of the earth. So, if

there was a purpose in biological evolution, and it was the creation of man after the image of God, Mars would be to-day inhabited by a race of human beings. Since it is not, the doctrine of purpose falls to the ground with all the philosophical efforts of Bergson or Lloyd Morgan.

The knowledge regarding the habitability of Venus is still misty as the planet itself. The Grecian goddess of beauty keeps her charm hidden behind a tantalising veil of mystery. Astronomers have been lured to pull aside the veil only to be baffled. However, their curiosity has so far been rewarded with some informations which indicate that the mysterious member of the solar family is only approaching the physico-chemical stage in which the appearance of life may be a possibility. But here again it remains to be ascertained whether the possible organic evolution on Venus will go to the extent of producing man. Anyhow, from whatever is known, it can be deduced that the appearance of mankind is not a necessary outcome of organic evolution, even on those few bits of burned-out ashes which tend to be soiled by the excrescence of matter called life.

On the top of this knowledge of modern astronomy, so very disconcerting for human vanity, now it is further known that planets themselves are rarities in the cosmic scheme. They do not result as a rule from the process of physical evolution. The solar system most probably is the only system

of planets. But it is not a normal outcome of astronomical evolution. It has come into being as an accident, and man is the result of that accident. If the Universe is the creation of any God, the creator did not intend to place man in the picture. Mankind has stolen into the providential scheme. The appearance of man, therefore, is not in accord with the Divine Will ; it represents a violation of the law of Providence.

This being the case, is it not absurd that man should claim the credit of being the bearer of some divine mission, for the realisation of which the entire scheme of cosmic evolution was conceived ? The physical Universe is obviously not the stage set for the appearance of man as the agent or image or the son of God on earth. Therefore, there cannot be any possible connection between the movement of the heavenly bodies and the events in the life of the two-legged lumps of protoplasm which crawl on the surface of the earth by a sheer accident. I mean the spiritual connection, which is supposed to be the subject of astrological calculations. Material connection, of course, there is, life being the result of a certain physico-chemical organisation of matter.

Life alone is not a fortuitous phenomenon. The solar system, on a minor member of which life has appeared and attained the high level of manhood, itself originated by an accident. In the authoritative opinion of Sir James H. Jeans, the

solar system is a "freak", that is, an exception to the laws of astronomical evolution. Jeans is the founder of the latest and generally accepted theory about the origin of the solar system. The theory is that trillions of years ago, a much larger star passed close by the sun, and pulled out of it a long trail of incandescent gas which eventually broke up into pieces, which in consequence of their rotatory motion, inherited, so to say, from the sun, assumed spherical shapes. The gaseous balls gradually cooled down and condensed to become the planets of our solar system. The evolution of the physical Universe being governed by strictly deterministic laws, nothing purely accidental can happen. So, it is not altogether excluded that similar happenings that caused the birth of our solar system might take place somewhere and sometime. But the probability against the repetition of such a happening is so great that, for practical purposes, it can be regarded as an impossibility. On the basis of precise mathematical calculations, Jeans has come to the conclusion that, in a period of seven million years, only about one star in a hundred thousand will approach near enough to another for the birth of a solar system to be possible, and even then, there are odds perhaps of ten to one against a solar system actually being formed. The same authority has estimated that the growth of life is theoretically possible on a thousand million millionth part of the entire physical

Universe. It actually exists only on an infinitesimal fraction of the possible portion.

The superstitious nature of the belief in astrology is exposed in the light of these observed facts and experimentally verified theories of modern astronomy and astral-physics. Gods in heaven do not watch over the fate of man. Man is not a marionette dancing on strings pulled by the gods in heaven or planets in their course. No self-respecting human being should picture himself or herself in such a predicament. If you believe in gods in heaven, you must also know that they are too egoistic to bother about the fate of man. They are too busy with their drinking bouts and *Apsaras*. In between, they have their extra-legal erotic adventures—even with the *guru's* wives. They have their petty intrigues, jealousies and quarrels. Then, they are always being licked by the demons, and chased out of the paradise. Obviously, such a tribe of heavenly beings, if it really existed, would be too preoccupied with their own affairs to bother about others. Besides, man would simply debase himself by entrusting his fate to the care of such a gang of drunkards, profligates, idlers, imbeciles and cowards, as are supposed to populate the den of inequity called the paradise.

If you hitch astrology to the movement of the planets, you must be disappointed to know that most of them that enter your calculation do not really exist, and that the planets existing outside

the imagination of the astrologer go in their course utterly indifferent to the fate of the biped animals who soil the surface of one of them.

Now I shall leave this subject with a question : Did you ever put astrology to an empirical test ? If it has any scientific validity, it must be able to stand the test, at least approximately. Here is a test you may try.

Taking the earth as a whole, there is one human being born every half a minute, on the average. If a particular constellation lasts even for a few minutes (it lasts much longer according to astrology), there must be innumerable groups of several people experiencing identical events throughout life ; because those belonging to any particular group are born under the same constellation. It will not be very difficult to ascertain if that is the case. The discovery of a few groups of individuals living identical lives would make a very strong case in support of astrology. The test can be made in a different way—historically. Constellations repeat themselves, according to astrology. So, granted the correctness of astrological predictions, history should be repeating itself to a considerable extent, not once, but many times. There must be a multiplicity of Buddhas, Christs, Mohammeds, Alexanders, Hannibals, Napoleons, so on and so forth. Indeed, history should be a regular repetition of a cliché of certain sets of events, because according to astrology, there is a

limited number of possible constellations. The number of the patterns of human life, therefore, must necessarily be limited by the possible number of constellations. To put astrology to this test, one needs only cast a critical glance over the history of the world. It will be found that history does not repeat itself as it should, if the events of human life were determined by the imaginary constellations of astrology.

Superstition is the greatest obstacle to spiritual progress. Astrology is a superstition. India will not be able to extricate herself from her present position of misery, shame, degradation and demoralisation, unless it ceases to raise superstition on to the high pedestal of spiritual superiority. The conditions for the renaissance of India are revolt against tradition, of reason against authority, of knowledge against faith. Let the past bury its dead, however illustrious they may have been, and learn a motto of life from the poet Tagore—a poem he wrote before he became a prophet and began to preach mysticism as all prophets always do. But the poet survives the prophet. Let us laugh at the prophet, but learn from the poet. Here is what you can also learn :

Let us go forward, forward, brothers !
 To lag behind, is to live for nothing ;
 What is the use of living a life which is
 death ?

CHAPTER II

THE IDEAL OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD

OURS is an overpopulated country—in the sense that it has probably the highest birth-rate. Reliable statistical data are practically absent. The vast bulk of the population do not keep any record of births. Yet, a very high rate of births is clearly indicated by the rapid increase of population. As a matter of fact, the net increase of population is not the true indicator of the actual rate of births. The ratio is much greater. Because, the high birth-rate is more than counter-balanced by the still higher rate of infant mortality. On the whole, the death-rate is higher in India than in the economically more advanced countries. Still, her population has been increasing fast enough. That means an extraordinarily high birth-rate.

That creates the baffling problem of population. The poverty of the masses lies at the root of the problem. It is the primary cause of the comparative largeness of the incidents of births as well as of deaths. The cause of the birth of too many children is to be traced in the cultural backwardness of the masses which, in its turn, is determined by their economic conditions. On the other hand, about fifty per cent of the first-born children die soon after birth, and infant mortality is gene-

rally so high because of the physical deterioration of the masses due to chronic malnutrition.

Cultural backwardness—the absence of the understanding of the most elementary principles of hygiene and sanitation—also plays its part in the tragic drama. But that again is the dire result of economic stagnation and deterioration. There is a high rate of mortality even among those children who do not die either at birth or soon afterwards,—the foredoomed fifty per cent. That is largely due to the parents' inability to procure even the most minimum quantity of the requisite alimentation. The want of medical aid is a contributing cause.

All these dismal facts raise the question whether the practice of birth-control could not be advantageously introduced in India. Of course, it goes without saying that the device could possibly serve only as a temporary remedy for relieving the distress, particularly of the modern educated middle-class. The practice cannot be wide-spread in this country. To realise the necessity of birth-control and to practise it hygienically, the woman must attain a minimum level of modern education and general culture. That condition is absent in the case of the vast bulk of Indian womanhood. The multitude of them perform the process of reproduction almost like animals. Sex-intercourse is practised as a matter of habit, and even as a duty. Children are born at random. They are

brought into this world without any sense of responsibility on the part of the parents. If some die at birth or soon afterwards, others follow directly. The standing tragedy is regarded as a freak of fate. The belief in fate or in the Will of God precludes the realisation of the sense of responsibility which alone could introduce intelligence in the habit of procreating.

At the other end of the social pole, there is no necessity for controlling the birth-rate artificially. With the rich, in the position to have varied interests in life, the birth-rate is automatically controlled. Even those who can well afford to bring up any number of children, as a rule, have only a few. This is so particularly among the well-to-do, with modern education and culture. There are various reasons for this apparently paradoxical phenomenon, the main being unconscious practice of birth-control. It results automatically from the mode of life of the educated and cultured rich.

The more cultured a nation, the lower the birth-rate. That is an empirical fact of sociology. France, for example, has the lowest birth-rate. In England as well as in the U. S. A., it is on the decline. In contrast, Italy has the highest birth-rate in Europe. Even before Mussolini introduced the practice of raising cannon-fodder *en masse*, the Italian peasant woman was famed for her fecundity. Before the war, when the vast bulk of

German women practised the prescribed virtues of the "hausfrau", the Kaiser could count upon a plentiful supply of soldiers.

The situation changed after the war. The social emancipation and cultural development of the post-war generation of German women were amazing. There was a revolution in the outlook also of the menfolk, particularly of the intellectual and professional classes. The mass murder of the millions of young men could not but shock feminine sensitiveness. Motherhood is a doubtful glory if its function is to supply the political slaughter-house. All these social and psychological factors contributed to the decline of the birth-rate in Germany.

Nazi militarism is frantically trying to overcome the handicap by forcing the woman back into a sort of modern *zenana*, and depressing the cultural level of the entire people. It may succeed for a time ; it may not do even that much. Ultimately, the policy is bound to fail. The Germans are too cultured to breed like pigs. Even the backward peasants are educated enough to realise the uncertainties of the economic situation, and consequently have the sense of responsibility for the well-being of the coming generation.

Driven out of gainful employments, young women have no choice. They must return to the kitchen ; but in the short period between the downfall of the Kaiser and the advent of Hitler,

under the ill-fated Weimar Republic, the German women lived fast and learned much. The rich experience gained in those eventful years cannot be easily obliterated. They cannot be expected to return for good to the *Kueche* (Kitchen), nor transform each home into a *Kinder-Fabrik* (factory for breeding children).

Thanks to the poverty and cultural backwardness of the masses, pre-revolutionary Russia was also a prodigious mother. The fecundity of the Russian peasantry still remains unimpaired. Mass psychology cannot be changed in a generation, specially of those who are not actively involved in the revolution. But in the cities, the birth-rate declined in the post-revolutionary period thanks to the extreme intensity of the socio-political life and a rapid cultural advance. In the coming years, the birth-rate is bound to fall throughout the U.S.S.R., in an inverse ratio to the general cultural progress guaranteed by the establishment of socialist economy. But given the new social conditions there, the law of population will be modified. Most probably, there will be an absolute fall of the birth-rate; but within the limits of that general law, the population will expand, because there will be no economic restriction. The situation, however, will be radically different from the pre-revolutionary days, when human beings bred as a matter of habit, like animals. Cultivated people are bound to exercise discretion. Even when the

economic reasons therefore are absent, higher interests of life interfere with child-bearing, while freeing and enriching the emotional life based upon sex-attraction, called love. The sex-impulse in human beings differs from that in animals in that it rises above the biological function of reproduction, and expresses itself in a variety of beautiful forms of emotion.

In the prevailing cultural atmosphere of India, the question of birth-control arises only in the case of the modern educated middle-class. Therefore, the introduction of the practice will not generally touch the problem of population. Nevertheless, it will certainly enable the middle-class to overcome some of the difficulties they experience under the given socio-political conditions of the country. Unemployment has become a veritable nightmare for the middle-class youth ; none of the palliatives suggested, even if seriously applied, will relieve the distress. The hopeless position of the middle-class, in its turn, reflects the economic bankruptcy of the masses. "Prosperity" built on that precarious foundation of mass bankruptcy cannot in any way be shared by the middle-class. The solution of the problem lies in a quickening of the general economic life of the country,—industrialisation on a large scale, not cramped by the limitations of the capitalist mode of production. That means not only formal national freedom, but the creation of a really democratic State.

Meanwhile, the distress of the middle-class grows, sapping the physical energy and weakening the mental vigour of the very social elements who are to play an important role in the impending political revolution which must take place as a condition for the rejuvenation of the Indian society.

Any number of young men are married while still in the school, and are fathers of children when they find themselves unemployed, indeed, practically unemployable, on finishing their academic education. Can you expect them to be public-spirited, concerned with anything but their own affairs? Weighed down by their own burden, they have no time to think of others. Unemployment may make the educated youth discontented; some of them may be driven to desperate acts. But on the whole, it is bound to have a depressing and demoralising effect. Those engrossed with the immediate problem of earning a livelihood cannot have a broad vision. They are bound to be indifferent to general social problems, and disinclined to have a long perspective of things.

Of course, all these immediate problems will not be directly solved by the practice of birth-control. But it will be beneficial psychologically, and in consequence arrest the moral degeneration and physical deterioration of the youth. In other words, the practice of birth-control may not have any direct economic value ; it will, however, touch

other aspects of the social problem. It will free the youth from handicaps imposed upon them by tradition and the established social and domestic customs. That freedom will enable them to see beyond the tip of their nose, so to say ; to take a broad view of the situation ; to realise that their particular problems result from a general problem. They will have a greater freedom of action, and that will mean a great impetus for the mobilisation of the forces of social renaissance.

The practice of birth-control will relieve the youth of the burden of domestic responsibilities which, incurred obligatorily, they simply cannot discharge under the given conditions of the country. The young people marry, and have children automatically. Why should they not avoid the responsibility which cannot be discharged, for no fault of theirs ? Why should they, as a matter of animal habit, sanctified by patriarchal social traditions, beget children they cannot provide for, cannot equip suitably for the struggle of life, cannot even guarantee the minimum requirements for a normal physical growth ? The alternative may be not to marry ; and celibacy is a laudable virtue in this country. But it is not generally practised simply because it cannot be.

The institution of marriage is primarily based upon the necessity of performing a fundamental biological function in an orderly manner, so to say. The opposite sexes naturally attract each other.

Celibacy, therefore, is an outrage against nature. However, supposing there is a mass flight from marriage, what will be the result ? There will be a promiscuous practice of sex-intercourse, in the so-called immoral and illicit manner.

One may choose not to marry, refuse to enter into a man-made relation ; but he is bound to obey the law of nature. Some of the bachelors may be celibates ; the majority are not. Therefore, apart from the moral aspect, the abnormal situation will produce a new problem—illegitimate children *en masse*. That nasty problem could be obviated in one of the two possible ways : clandestine infanticide on an enormous scale, or practice of birth-control. No sensible person would dispute that the latter alternative would certainly be preferable, morally as well as humanly. Trying to find an alternative to the “immoral and unnatural” practice of birth-control, we are thus driven to that very device as the lesser of the two evils born of a futile attempt to find an easy way out of a difficult social situation.

Then, mass flight from marriage is not a practical proposition. It is not permitted by Hindu social custom. To marry is a religious duty ; so also is to beget children,—in wedlock. Those who would not permit the practice of birth control on moral and religious grounds, could not, for the same reason, countenance refusal to marry, except in the cases of individuals taking the vow of celi-

bacy, and these can only be exceptions. But in the case of women, marriage is the law. If a large number of men refuse to marry, there will be an equal number of unmarried women—a situation not permitted by our social custom and religious tradition. So, by compelling the women to marry, Hinduism deprives men also of the freedom in that respect. Polygamy no longer offers an escape out of the dilemma ; on a large scale it has become an economic impossibility. Consequently, practically all men also must marry, as a rule, if Hindu society is to stick to the prejudice that single women are misfortunes. The hypothetical remedy of mass flight from marriage thus has to be ruled out. It is unavailable as well as ineffective for curing the evil of unwanted children.

The practice of birth-control has become an economic necessity for the distressed middle-class ; therefore, it is finding favour with the more intelligent, more courageous and more responsible among the educated youth of both sexes. Realising that, under the given economic conditions of their class, they may not be able to bring up children properly, they are reluctant to incur the responsibility. Nor do they wish to prejudice their freedom of action by early, premature, parenthood. They want to grow as men and women, live a love-life free from the cares of domesticity, before becoming fathers and mothers. They feel that the duty to themselves must have priority over their other

duties. There is no selfishness in this attitude. On the contrary, it betokens a sense of social responsibility.

Few normal youths would choose to be celibate bachelors or old maids hugging the dubious virtue of virginity. The control of child-birth, either in wedlock or outside, is the only way out of the dilemma. The more courageous are advocating it; the practice is growing. The venerable custodians of India's religious traditions and the self-appointed keepers of her moral conscience are horrified and scandalised by the perversity of youth. But what alternative way do they show? Dare they enjoin that children must be bred as a religious duty, even when the parents are fully conscious of their inability to provide for the new-comers? By issuing such absurd injunction, our elders would forfeit their claim to guide the youth. There is a confusion, which is more confounded by pompous moralisings and platitudinous talks about Indian ideals. That does not help when an important social element is confronted with the question: To be or not to be—should birth-control be practised or not? There must be a clear answer. The question is too acute to be begged. None can advocate habitual breeding of unwanted children, and yet claim to have any sense of responsibility. On the other hand, prejudice precludes the courage

of facing the fact. Failed by the elders, the youth must find their way out of the crisis.

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It is reported that the other day Margaret Sanger interviewed Mahatma Gandhi, and had a prolonged discussion with him on the question of birth-control. Since then, the controversy has been carried on in the press. The opposing arguments are familiar enough. But the interesting point is that the Mahatma disapproves not of birth-control as such, but of the use of contraceptives for the purpose. He is of the opinion that married people should abstain from sex-intercourse, if they don't want children. He simply brushes aside the complications which will surely result from the proposed practice of married celibacy. He would not admit that this novel method of birth-control is a physical impossibility for the ordinary mortal made of flesh and blood.

Then, there arises the obvious question—Why marry at all? Why does not the Mahatma recommend mass *Brahmacharya*? Instead of making the curious proposition that each home should be transformed practically into a monastery, why not advise young men and women to become monks and nuns? The answer is not difficult to find. For the Hindu, marriage is a religious duty. But then comes the contradiction: to breed is also a religious duty. According to Hinduism, the object

of marriage is to have children. Childless marriage is regarded as a misfortune. If the wife fails to give birth to children, the husband is entitled to marry again. If we are to be guided by strict scriptural injunctions, birth-control, even as advised by Gandhi, cannot be legitimately practised. Because, that would be violating scriptural rules and social traditions. Yet, Gandhi takes his stand precisely on these grounds. Two sets of questions are involved in the controversy. One about sex-intercourse ; is it sinful, except when performed for breeding ? Is it not a physical and emotional necessity, irrespective of the act of procreation ? Is it harmful for spiritual (in the broad sense of mental and emotional) development ? The other question is about the position of women in Hindu society.

Gandhi advises women to resist lustful husbands. It is rather flattering for the fair sex. But few will be deceived. Sex-attraction is mutual. Women are no more goddesses than men are animals. Before giving them the advice, one should enquire if they want to resist. The fact is that they do not, and that fact alone shows that the moralist does not know what he is talking about, although he lays the claim to an intimate acquaintance with the psychology of women,—a strange claim on the part of a Saint. However, Gandhi's advice to women assumes that they are free agents. Are they ? Does Hinduism permit

women to resist their husbands? Moreover, Gandhi's approach to the problem of sex-intercourse has no regard for personal inclination. He looks at it from what he considers to be a religious and moral point of view, the morality being a peculiarly dogmatic brand of his own. Therefore, he advises women to do something which is totally incompatible with their place in society, allotted to them by religion and tradition.

Let alone the position of women in Hindu society; even in modern countries, where women have much more rights than in India, resistance is a legitimate ground for divorce. It is regarded as a violation of the marriage contract. Of course, one hears much about the spirituality of the Hindu institution of marriage: it is not a mere contract, but a religious sacrament. Granted it is so, it only imposes a greater obligation on the women. It is not a contract made voluntarily by the parties concerned. It is a sacrifice of the woman; the proprietary right over her is transferred to the husband, and the transaction is sanctified by religion. The essence of the Hindu marriage ceremony is that the parents of the girl make of her a gift to the groom, who may have to be coaxed to accept the gift with additional inducements of more concrete value. Evidently not much importance is attached to the intrinsic value of the girl. However, the condition, on which the bridegroom accepts the gift, is that the girl will

obediently perform all the wifely duties laid down by religious codes and social customs. To bear children is the most fundamental of those duties. So, the possibility of resistance is altogether ruled out, if wives are to be up to the ideals of Hindu womanhood. The *summum bonum* of these is complete subservience to the husband, who is to be served, pleased and worshipped as a god, even as the God. If the deified husbands are so perverse as to find pleasure in sex-intercourse, as they usually are, what are the wives to do? They have no choice. The freedom to love or not to love is not a part of the noble ideal of Hindu womanhood. It is a religious duty, indeed obligation, of the woman to serve and satisfy the husband in every way, whether she loves him or not; and what is still worse, whether he loves her or not.

The impractical proposition for controlling sex-intercourse, and the dogmatic moral injunctions of Gandhi, provoked the following protest from the rebellious youth: "You want everyone to become moral in order to change the world. I do not exactly know what you mean by morality—whether you confine it to matters sexual, whether it covers the whole field of human conduct. I suspect the former, because I don't see you pointing out to your capitalist and landlord friends the great injustice and harm they are doing by making huge profits at the expense of labourers and peasants. While you are never tired of casti-

gating young men and women for their moral lapse in sexual matters, and upholding before them the virtue of celibacy, I humbly request you to be kind and compassionate to the youth and not to judge them by your puritanical standard of morality. Every act, when it is performed with mutual consent and mutual love, is moral, whether it is performed within marriage or without. I would here ask you not to forget your own youth when judging the present day youth. You were an oversexed individual, given to excessive indulgence, which seems to have created in you a sort of disgust towards sexual acts, and hence your asceticism. Compared to you, I think, many young men of to-day are better in this respect."

The above extracts from a letter were published in the "Harijan". The name of the writer was not given out, but the letter was characterised as "typical". Presumably, many such had been received. However, it is a severe criticism of Gandhi's moral doctrines. But in his answer, he avoids the concrete issues raised about his attitude on fundamental social questions, and gives a dissertation on metaphysical ethics. He writes: "Ethics and religion are convertible terms. A moral life without reference to religion is like a house based upon sand. Morality includes truth, *ahimsa* and continence. Non-violence and continence are derivable from truth, which for me is God. Without continence, a man or woman is un-

done. To have no control over the senses is like sailing in a rudderless ship, bound to break to pieces on coming in contact with the very first rock. If mutual consent makes a sex-act moral, whether within or without marriage, and by parity of reason, even between members of the same sex, the whole basis of sexual morality is gone. There is hope for a decent life only so long as the sex-act is definitely related to the conception of precious life. This rules out of count perverted sexuality, and to a lesser degree, promiscuity and condonation, if not endorsement, of unnatural vice."

It is not a very original doctrine to refer morality to religion. The fallacy of this fundamental doctrine of dogmatic ethics is the assumption that man is naturally immoral. There is no difference between this moral philosophy and the Christian dogma of original sin. The assumption that man is naturally immoral or sinful contradicts the idea of soul. Goodness or virtue has little merit if men are to be coerced to be good or virtuous. It is an insult to the intelligence of man to say that he can behave decently only under fear or compulsion. Morality is real only when it can stand by itself, when it does not require any metaphysical or religious sanction. The free self-respecting and dignified individual prefers the old Epicurean conception of morality : his or her desire to be good, virtuous and noble as

a matter of free will makes him or her revolt against the tyranny of the God or scriptural injunctions.

Gandhist morality is admittedly a bunch of dogmas. In order to be moral, one must be truthful. One abstraction is referred back to another. Unless we are given a clear criterion of truth, this sort of morality remains an undefined virtue. Then, continence. If that is essential for a virtuous life, why did not God make us all aphrodites? In that case, continence would be natural to all, and the world would be populated with a tribe of virtuous and godly beings. But it seems that the Maker's aesthetic sense revolted against the idea of such a monstrosity, and he preferred to make "sinfulness" inherent in the nature of man. Therefore, it is a bold, indeed sacrilegious, assertion that without continence a man or woman is undone.

The fallacy of Gandhi's moral doctrine is thus exposed in the light of its own standards. Empirically, it appears to be even more monstrous. Are the higher type of men and women of Europe morally and intellectually any worse than Indians? Moreover, Gandhi regrets that the Indians also do not practice continence. Well, then, you are preaching an unattainable ideal, which is a physical impossibility. It is idle to spin out volumes, and pester people with boring sermons, when there are more practical tasks to be accomplished and more reliable goals to strive for. As a matter of fact,

the whole sermon is superfluous. Who preaches uncontrolled sex life? Life itself generally provides the necessary control. Only pampered parasites can dissipate, and for them, the moralist has no rebuke, as very pertinently pointed out by the correspondent quoted above.

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The prophet should study the subject before laying down absolute dictums. Homo-sexuality is rampant among Indian young men. It is an abnormality. But what is the cause? There are social as well as psychological reasons. Sex-segregation of the adolescent, and economic difficulties on the way to the satisfaction of a natural desire, in the normal and candid manner, drive young men to the homo-sexual habit. Remove those obstacles, and the practice would very largely disappear. No amount of moralising would have the same effect.

As regards the sexual relation between men and women, what, after all, is the basis of sex-morality, except mutual consent and love? The moralists do not realise the perversity of the role religion plays in this relation. The institution of religious marriage sanctions the commission of rape *en masse*. Neither consent nor love, on the part of the woman is a condition for the sexual satisfaction of the man, and this brutality is sanctioned not only by law, but by religion. Is that very moral? A fundamental human emotion is subjected to vulgar utilitarianism, when it is held that sex-

intercourse is permissible only with the purpose of breeding children.

Scientifically, this vulgar utilitarianism ignores the fact that procreation does not necessarily require sex-intercourse. There are animals which do without it. In a certain stage of biological evolution, procreation takes place through the division of cells. Sex is a later development, as the basis of an emotion which attains a high level of nobility in the human species. Procreation is the biological by-product of that noble emotion. It may not be very long before the biological event of procreation may be altogether separated from the beautiful emotional super-structure of sex-life. Artificial creation of life is already a theoretical possibility. It will be practicable in course of time. Why should, then, women be subjected to the agony of child-bearing as a part of her religious duty or social responsibility? Until science gives her greater freedom, she should not be compelled to bear children except voluntarily.

However, even when artificial creation of life will be practicable, sex will remain. Men and women will be mutually attracted. Love will continue to enrich their life. Sex-act, committed as the expression of the emotion called love, will be independent of "the conception of precious life". According to Gandhi, all hope for a decent life will disappear in that case. How, then, are we to avert that catastrophe? The imperious march

of scientific knowledge cannot be arrested by the senseless sermon of the moralist. Are we, then, going to castrate all men and sterilise all women, to keep them from the sinful act of sex-intercourse, when the creation of life will be independent of it?

It is sheer blasphemy to condemn sex-act as an unnatural sin. Incidentally, one may ask the curious question : what are natural sins ? Sex-impulse is natural. To suppress it, therefore, is unnatural, and sinful, if we talk in religious terms. For, that is violation of an order created by God. If God did not sanction the commission of sex-act, except for procreation, he could have spared human beings the infliction of the sex-impulse. He could ordain so that procreation took place by the division of cells all through the process of biological evolution. As a matter of fact, it happens that way even in the human species. So, in the strict scientific sense, the enjoyment of sex-intercourse has very little to do with the process of procreation. The relation between the two is only accidental. It is now theoretically known that the two events can be separated. Thus, with the higher biological forms, sex-intercourse, essentially, is the expression of an emotion generated by mutual attraction of the sexes.

Gandhi's reply to the bold charge made against him personally by the correspondent is apologetic. He claims to have practised Brahmacharya since he was thirty-three. That by itself is not a very credit-

able record. But the hollowness of that record itself is exposed by a very significant confession he made last year. The confession was that the sex-impulse was still very strong in the old man nearing seventy, after more than thirty years of the practice of Brahmacharya. Nature takes her revenge. Even the Saint cannot cheat her. The life-stories of all the Saints of history bear testimony to defeat in the struggle against the laws of nature. The impulse is not killed, nor controlled. Gandhi's confession proves that the charge of over-sexuality is not unfounded. With a normal man, the sex-impulse generally disappears, by the time one approaches seventy. Gandhi is sixty seven. The fact of over-sexuality is further proved by the obsession with the question of sex. These are no personal reflections. The object is to show that his own life disproves the dogma of the moralist.

Yet, defending his opposition to birth control, Gandhi wrote in the "Harijan" that the middle-class has become impotent, owing to bad habits on the part of the youth. He deplored that young school and college girls should avidly read birth-control literature and even keep contraceptives. What a horror! But it does not occur to the righteous moralist that those habits, wherever they exist, result from the forced sex-ethics buttressed on religious sanctions and social taboos. Gandhi says that it is a sin against God to waste the vital fluid. What a tragic ignorance of biology! According to

this ignorant view, the whole of nature does nothing but commit sins. How many seeds are wasted in her scheme of reproduction ! Waste is the rule ; fructification is only an accident.

Gandhi is, of course, concerned about "the sacred bond of marriage". In his opinion, its object is reproduction. No sacred bond is necessary for that natural process. It takes place everywhere without any sacred bond. The "sacred bond of marriage", is slavery for women. They are treated as the means of production, privately owned by men. Gandhi says that the woman has been given the field of life by God, and it is her duty to make use of it. That is only a sickeningly sanctimonious way of saying the same thing—the woman is a child-bearing machine. However, if the field of life is a gift of God, why cannot the woman select the seed to be planted on her field, and hire the ploughman to her liking. To allow her that liberty, would be obeying the law of God. But the trouble with the religious people is that they are constantly violating the laws of their God, on his authority.

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Many fables have been fabricated about the exalted position of the woman in Hindu society. There are volumes of legends about it. Even today, lyrics are woven around that fiction. Hinduism is said to concede perfect equality to women. They are granted the status of goddesses, though of

the household variety. Granted that godly status, why should they hanker after worldly rights and privileges ? These transitory, and, therefore negligible, things are not included in the perfect equality of women in Hindu society. Their lives are consummated in the mystic, indissoluble, union with their husbands. They are above the selfishness of the desire for any individual social or spiritual existence. Love, with them, is not lust, degraded to the level of carnal relations. It is a spiritual passion for giving ; their own selves being the best of the gifts, they lay it at the feet of the beloved, who may not reciprocate the passion in a similar way. They love without wanting to be loved. They give without asking for anything in return. They find a pleasure in giving, in loving. The Hindu woman is the incarnation of selflessness. No wonder that men should appreciate her virtue and enshrine her in the temple of domesticity, where she enjoys endless privileges including the bearing of unwanted children. This fiction of a spiritual union gilds the galling chains of chattel-slavery.

All these fables, fictions and lyrics, however, cannot make the secker after truth blind to the fact that the codes of Manu deprive women of all independence. Always, throughout her life, she must be under the protection of some male or other. Protection is an euphemistic term for subordination. As a matter of fact, Manu specifies the

periods of a woman's life, in which she "belongs" respectively to the father, husband and the son ; and the refrain of the famous code is that the woman can never be independent. The codes of Manu are said to be the treasure-house of the highest and noblest social ideals. The bulk of our modern women are still deluded by those spurious jewels. But there are some who are realising the reality of their position. The other day, one of them exploded the bubble of the fondly cherished delusions, and laid bare the lie about the exalted position of the woman in Hindu society.

"In India, for centuries, the woman's drama of life has been enacted on a puppet stage crowded with futile, frustrated and tragic characters, and it is a drama that appears to have evolved the highest religious sentiments. Her mute surrender to things as they had been ordained became synonymous with the highest manifestation of feminine virtue and the glory attached to it. The more she bore injustice and wrong without murmur, the more she subjugated her personal life to the dictates of primitive proprietary tribalism, the more woman-like, the more virtuous, she became. For centuries, the woman was regarded as a living ware that should belong to some man ; so she was married off at the earliest possible opportunity. Once possessed, she went through life as man's

possession—never as a play-mate, not even a play-thing, but just a possession.”*

The pious defenders of Indian traditions and the ideals of Indian culture are perturbed by the spread of Western influence among the educated women of the younger generation. They not only deplore the tendency, but publicly castigate the corrupt for deserting the noble ideals of Indian womanhood. But in doing so, they themselves expose the significance of these cherished ideals.

In a meeting held on March 20, 1936 under the auspices of Delhi Women's League, such an authoritative exponent of Hindu culture as Dr. Bhagwan Das declared: “We must not talk in terms of equality between man and woman. They are both halves of humanity. We must rather talk in terms of companionship than equality.” It is all very bewildering—this mystification of the simplest things. For harmonious relationship between man and woman, equality is not necessary. But these very custodians of Indian culture, as politicians, criticise the doctrine of India's partnership in the British Empire on the ground that true partnership is possible only on the basis of equality. Have they been talking nonsense all this time? Or do they talk through their pugrees or Gandhi caps, while expounding the metaphysics of the relation between man and

* Nilima Devi, “Hindusthan Times”, February 10, 1936.

woman? Evidently, the latter is the case; for, the position they take up as politicians is undoubtedly sound.

Halves are not equals—queer arithmetic! If halves are not equal, then, they are not halves. A non-existing relation is idealised so that the negation of equality may appear plausible. What is the corollary to this axiom of mystic mathematics? The partnership between man and woman is not equal. We are taught that the Hindu institution of marriage binds two souls in a unified existence. If the components are not equal, clearly, one is more than the other. Which is the superior? The man, of course. Companionship is a myth. Man is the protector of the weaker vessel which he owns. That is the law of Manu.

Why deny equality? Have women no souls? Souls are supposed to be so many sparks of the Divine Light. Thus, to deny women equality with men is a blasphemy against the fundamental tenet of Hinduism. But when it comes to the vital question of proprietary right, religion can go by the board, if it happens to contradict the most precious principle of social relations. In the feudal-patriarchal society, woman is regarded and treated as a part of man's worldly possessions. Therefore, the defenders of the ideals of ancient India cannot tolerate the talk of equality between man and woman.

But despite all the panegyrics of its fictitious

ideals, the feudal-patriarchal society is an ugly ghost of the past. It lies in ruins, waiting to be cleared away. The ancient ideals have lost all force, their social foundation having been undermined by time and by the impact of modern civilization. They can be defended only with sophisticated arguments, if the defenders are reluctant to play the damaging role of rank reactionaries. The worm, however, is turning. In a rapidly growing number, young educated women are refusing to be deluded by fables, to be taken in by the sophistry of the "modern Rishis". They live under changing social conditions, and consequently cannot escape the contagion of new ideals. The crisis created by the rise of modern women, inspired by the new ideals of a real freedom and partnership on the basis of equality, has been vividly depicted by one of them already quoted above. Let me quote her once again.

"Any woman, who dares to solve her personal problems outside the rigid framework of the feudalistic system in which she is born, runs the risk of not only being regarded as a rebel, but also labelled a woman militant. Any slight ruffling of the placid surface of Indian life looks to the die-hard a portent of storm. The defenders of a system that has relied for its maintenance on the perpetuation of injustice to a large majority of its members, would naturally take fright at the faintest rattling of their prisoners' chains. And who have

been more enslaved under this system than the Indian women? Among the most vocal exponents of the women's movement are scarcely to be found the representatives of those who have suffered the worst and endured the most. Were these women to speak out, Indian society would be faced with a problem far more ominous than the alarmists could imagine."

If the legend about the exalted position of woman in Hindu society had any foundation of fact, there would be no cause for this crisis. Why should women rebel, if they had really enjoyed the respect and companionship of men? Lest the above voice of a courageous pioneer be dismissed as the ranting of a blind fanatic, I shall cite the opinion of one who cannot be accused of running down Indian culture wantonly.

In his farewell address to the students of the Andhra University, in March 1936, Sir S. Radhakrishnan pronounced the following severe judgment. "Religious bigotry, which treats millions of our countrymen in a senseless and inhuman way, and imposes intolerable disabilities and inconveniences on the womanhood of the country, is a standing danger. It is corruption of the spirit. Those who impose such disabilities on other human beings are themselves victims of ignorance and superstition."

But what should we think when we find national leaders defending those disabilities, and

denouncing whoever revolts against the inequitable system, as misguided by false ideals? Superstitious most of them are, more or less, but they cannot claim the credit of the bliss of ignorance. They know what they are talking about. Their opposition to all new ideas and movements is deliberate. They are defenders of an antiquated social order, based upon the slavery of the multitude, sanctified by religion. Ideas of equality and freedom are foreign to the "spiritualist" tradition of India. The belief in the fictitious equality of immaterial souls, together with the doctrine of spiritual liberation, dismisses social equality and worldly freedom as paltry things, not to be bothered about. My soul is free; how can I ever be a slave? The stark reality of social slavery is obscured by the fiction of a free soul. The idea of human freedom is not compatible with the belief in a teleological order. Everything in the world is predetermined by the inscrutable Will of God. How can then a mortal be free?

The defenders of a social order based on such religious dogmas are naturally horrified when even women begin to be attracted by strange ideas imported from the accursed West. The impertinence of women demanding equality and freedom forces the protagonists of Indian culture to tell the truth about the place allotted to women by the saintly law-givers of ancient India. They have no

patience for new-fangled ideas; and, when provoked, they sternly show women their place.

Deprecating the demand of modern woman, Dr. Bhagwan Das, in the speech quoted above, expounded the Hindu doctrine about marriage and family. "Marriage is not a picnic; it is discipline which people must carry out. Society would break up, if men and women forgot the sacredness of marriage, and talked of it in loose terms. In India, family is the unit of society; in the West, the individual. Our system is undoubtedly the best. Indian don't believe in individualism. Our ideal is humanism, familyism."

There we have the naked truth, told by a "modern Rishi". The relation between man and woman is clearly defined. The Indian ideal of womanhood is depicted realistically; and it is a matter of categorical imperative. There *must* be discipline; laws laid down for the governance of a patriarchal society must be obeyed, even to-day in the midst of the twentieth century. Marriage is not a picnic, we are told. What does that mean? It means that marriage is not a companionship; that it is an indissoluble bond which deprives woman of all freedom, denies her the right to an individual existence. A wife is not a human being. For her, there are only duties to be performed, not voluntarily, but under an inflexible discipline. The doctrine of discipline, which prohibits even freedom of thought, transforms the individual into an

automaton. A society, composed of robots, who do not think, but only obey, is a prison. Laws are sovereign only when they are made by common consent. Of course, social conduct and family relations should be disciplined, but the discipline must not be imposed from above. It should be voluntary. Otherwise, it is coercion. The discipline demanded by one of our "modern Rishis" is of this kind.

There might be some excuse for this autocratic doctrine of social and family relations, if discipline was demanded from all concerned. But that is not the case. It is neither a matter of argument nor of theory. It is a matter of fact that, while with women scripturally prescribed discipline is an absolute bondage, with men, it is a matter of mere formality. Indeed, even theoretically, the burden of discipline is not equitably distributed. Man, as the father and husband, is the disciplinarian; the burden of discipline falls all on the woman. The Hindu marriage ceremony does not establish a relation of companionship. It places the woman under the protection of the man. And the social protectorate of man over woman is no more an "alliance for existence", for mutual benefit, than political protectorate of the stronger Powers over the weak. In either case, protectorate is a camouflaged form of possession. The rituals of Hindu marriage give lie to all the lyrical legends about, and sophisticated interpretations of, the rela-

tion established thereby. The modern Rishis may torture the text to suit their purpose of defending the social subordination of woman; but the texts themselves are there to tell the truth; and if women are to live up to the traditionally fixed ideals, and observe the prescribed discipline, they must act textually according to the rituals. They must live a life of sacrifice, devotion and duty. These ideals, with all the sentimental glamour, cannot delude any self-respecting woman.

For women, Hindu marriage is certainly not a picnic. There is no question of love, except as a *post factum* make-believe. Marriage is not a voluntary contract to be carried out by both the parties under prescribed laws. Women are simply handed over to new masters, to whom they are to be bound forever. When responsibility is not voluntarily incurred, discipline cannot be morally demanded. Let women choose; let marriage be conditional on an intelligent consent on their part; then talk of discipline. To demand discipline under an involuntary relation, a relation established by a transfer of proprietorship, is coercion, pure and simple. The Hindu marriage grants women no rights whatsoever; it imposes only obligations. Discipline under such circumstances is compulsion to discharge responsibilities not voluntarily contracted. And a responsibility has no moral force unless it is voluntarily assumed. One cannot be held responsible for some act he has not committed.

It is not my duty to perform acts that I have never undertaken to do. The concepts of duty and responsibility presuppose agreement. In the absence of previous agreement, there is neither duty nor responsibility. So, the question of discipline under the relation established by Hindu marriage does not arise.

We are told pontifically that society would break up if men and women forgot the sacredness of marriage and talked of it in loose terms. Well, it is a well known fact that men generally seldom abide by the sacred vow; yet, society has not fallen to pieces. But the foundation of society would be shaken, if women expressed dissatisfaction at the treatment accorded to them. So, the bond of sacredness is only for them; and it is not very sacred, though it is certainly a bond. The taboo on "talk in loose terms" means prohibition of the criticism of an established relation which has become galling—utterly incompatible with changed social relations, and intolerable for women growing up under these conditions. Women should not even complain. For them, it is indecent to have any grievance. They must remain fascinated by the fictitious ideals placed before them. The laws laid down by Manu ages ago are still immutable.

But what about men? Why is discipline not nearly so rigorous in their case? Why are they not held to the sacred vow of marriage? Simply, because the scriptures do not demand of them the

same discipline as in the case of women; because their vow, formally as sacred as in the case of women, is nevertheless very elastic. The indissolubility of the marriage bond does not place them under any disadvantage. The bond is really indissoluble only when it precludes another marriage. It was so under mediaeval Christianity. Neither the man nor the woman could contract a second marriage; and, divorce being disallowed, the bond was equally binding for both the parties. That practice should logically follow from the doctrine that marriage is a sacred tie. The Hindu practice is not only illogical; it is positively immoral.

Polygamy mocks at the supposed sacredness of marriage. Those who take the doctrine of sacredness seriously must condemn polygamy as no less criminal than adultery. But, instead of doing what is demanded by an elementary sense of morality, Hinduism sanctions polygamy. The immoral practice of adultery is religiously sanctioned. That is one of the achievements of the spiritualist culture of India. What should we think of religious social codes which sanction an obviously immoral practice? Intelligent and free-thinking people cannot but condemn them in the severest possible terms.

Drawing the logical conclusion from the doctrine that marriage is a sacred bond, Catholicism prohibits its dissolution. Hindus are also vociferous in their condemnation of divorce which is regarded as

a Western perversity. As reply to the European criticism of undeniably shameful social practices still prevalent in this country, Indian apologists of those practices point an accusing finger at the frequency of divorce in some of the Western countries. It does not occur to them that forced sex-relation is no better than rape. To prohibit divorce is to sanction rape committed *en masse* with religious sanction. In his latest work, a renowned authority on the subject writes that the frequency of divorce is a sign of the strength of marriage. With a carefully collected and critically sifted mass of statistical data, he shows that divorce is not so frequent as the alarmists picture it to be. In the United States, for example, there is only one divorce to every six marriages. The ratio is not higher in the U. S. S. R. where marriage and family are generally believed to have disappeared.*

The Hindu prohibition of divorce is all the more immoral because it is one-sided. Since a man can take as many wives as he wishes, for him, the prohibition is entirely formal and ineffective. A freedom given to man is denied to the woman. The discipline also is obviously one-sided. For women only, marriage is a religious sacrament—an indissoluble bond. In the case of men, it *is* a picnic, a business proposition which, in a feudal-patriarchal society, is very profitable. Where were

* E. Westermarck, "The Future of Marriage in Western Civilization."

our Spartan disciplinarian when Brahmans of blue blood took wives by the dozen, but left them with their parents to be visited periodically on the payment of an honorarium, preference being given to those who paid more for a night with the perambulating male prostitute? Discipline or the sacredness of the marriage vow does not prohibit a man to have several wives, on a variety of pretexts, some of which are positively immoral, even inhuman. If a woman fails to perform the duty of bearing children, then man may take a new wife. The unfortunate woman is degraded to the humiliating position of a household servant for no fault of hers. She cannot possibly help her barrenness. Often, this is caused by disease or physical maladjustments which could be cured by proper medical treatment. To have her so treated is obviously the responsibility of the husband. Hinduism places not even such an elementary responsibility on him. He is allowed to acquire a fertile field, while retaining the possession of the barren one. He is still entitled to use her sexually, for a change or as occasional pastime. That habit amounts to the practice of concubinage under the sacred institution of Hindu marriage. Yet, any criticism of this immoral institution is denounced as "loose talk", even in these enlightened days, when educated people should be guided rather by reason than by authority.

It is not only immoral, but a cruel, inhuman

form of oppression—veritable slavery. If the husband is impotent, the wife has no way out. In consequence of that misfortune, she is bound to have psychological complications. She is in the danger of those complications developing into the pathological state of hysteria. Religious prejudice may taboo sex ; but the laws of nature are more powerful than the man-made laws of religion. A natural impulse cannot be killed by a *fiat*. Frustrated in the satisfaction of sex-impulse, normal human beings are bound to be ruined psychically, if not always physically. But let alone these considerations, which lead to the controversy over the question of sex-satisfaction, there is another consideration, having a direct bearing on the subject under discussion.

None would dispute the legitimacy and naturalness of the woman's desire for motherhood. To deny her the right of release from an impotent husband is to condemn her to a life of frustration in every respect. Motherhood is said to be the crowning glory of woman. The Hindu institution of marriage deprives her even of the freedom to attain that glory, which is admittedly her share. It is the duty of woman to bear her husband children. If she fails, due to causes beyond her control, man has the freedom of action. But similar failure on the part of the husband does not absolve the woman from the sacred vow of marriage !

Fidelity is generally considered to be the essence of marital relation. Hinduism does not demand that of men. As far as they are concerned, marriage is legalised adultery. Polygamy is legalised adultery which is practised on all sorts of pretexts, often most frivolous. A protracted illness on the part of the wife absolves the husband from the vow of fidelity. In that case, he is morally and scripturally entitled to take another wife for the sake of keeping up the family. And it is a part of the ideal of Indian womanhood not only to acquiesce in that heartless act of desertion, but to welcome the co-wife cheerfully and love her as a sister. It may be a noble ideal. That is a matter of taste and ethical sensibility. The prescribed conduct, however, is an emotional impossibility. Helpless women conform formally ; but the sense of morality and justice, when not dulled by the blind respect for tradition, naturally revolts against the practice, and must condemn it as a callous method of degrading women to the position of chattel—machines acquired by men for manufacturing children.

Adultery is condemned as a moral offence. What is adultery ? It is to practise co-habitation disregarding the pledge of fidelity to the married mate. If the moral condemnation of adultery has any sense, it must logically imply that one cannot be married to more than one person at the same time. The moral sanction for the condemnation

of adultery is derived from the notion that the pledge of fidelity is sacred. The moral condemnation of adultery logically provides the justification for divorce, which nevertheless is such a pet abomination of the Indian moralists.

When a man, for some reason or other, wishes to have a second wife, the obviously ethical thing for him to do is to absolve the first wife of the pledge of fidelity which he himself proposes to withdraw from his side. The prohibition of divorce is disregard for this very elementary sense of morality and justice. Why should the woman remain bound to the man, when he is no longer faithful to her even formally? When the pledge of fidelity is not equally binding for both the parties concerned, marriage evidently is not a companionship, but subordination of the woman to the man. In Hindu marriage, the pledge is admittedly not mutually binding. The man is entitled to commit adultery. But a sin is a sin, even when it is committed with religious sanction. In that case, it is religion which is exposed as an immoral system. Hinduism condemns adultery as a moral offence, but permits it when committed according to religious laws! A man can break his pledge of fidelity to the married mate with the sanction of religion. If he wishes to commit adultery, he has simply to marry the object of his lust; and he is entirely free to do so. Is not the pledge of fidelity a mockery?

What is the sense of giving a pledge which does not bind ?

For all practical purposes, Hinduism prohibits divorce only in the case of women ; it grants men all its benefits. When the marriage bond does not bind him to anything, man does not require the right of divorce. The Hindu horror for divorce is based on the principle that women naturally are not entitled to the freedom of sex-relation enjoyed by men to the extent of down-right licentiousness, with the sanction of religion. That is not a very moral principle. In fact, there is no morality in it at all. The underlying idea is of proprietorship. The woman is a part of man's worldly possessions. She is a field for him to cultivate. She is naturally destined to bear him children, just as his land bears him fruit. A man is entitled to own as many plots of land as he can afford to. Similarly, he can possess more than one wife. But it is unnatural for his wife to dispute his right of proprietorship, even to pass on to the possession of another man. Whoever has ever heard of a plot of land or any other piece of property claiming the right of choosing its owner ? It is natural for a piece of property to be owned, and for the owner to add to his possession. Therefore, it is also "natural" for women to live in indissoluble wedlock, while the lord and master is free to add to his possession.

But the freedom of sex-relation on the part of

women is no more unnatural than are the forms of society not based on private property. The sex-impulse is the only natural thing in this relation. The condition, under which that impulse is satisfied is a matter of social convention, and as such must change from time to time in course of social progress. No one form of sex-relation is more or less natural than another ; and none is unnatural, because always it is the fulfilment of a natural urge. The freer the relation, the fuller the life, and therefore the more natural it is.

Divorce is condemned on the ground that it is not compatible with the ideal of Indian womanhood. It was on this ground that Dr. Bhagwan Das denounced the Western practice of divorce. The ideal thus is sub-ordination of women to men,—an absence, in the case of the former, of the freedom of sex-relation which is accorded to the latter. That certainly is not a very noble ideal. Enlightened women, at any rate, can no longer be deluded by it ; nor can it be justified, much less glorified, by free-thinking men with a sense of justice and morality.

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While our nationalist leaders wax eloquent about traditional ideals, the reactionary nature of which is palpable to anyone able to distinguish facts from fiction, there are others who have the courage and progressive spirit to take a realistic view of the position of women in Hindu society,

and plead for the much needed improvement. The following, for example, is quoted from a speech by the Maharani of Baroda, who certainly cannot be accused of any feminist extravagance, nor suspected of the insidious spirit of revolt against the Hindu culture.

“Far from allowing her that equality with man, which in modern society is her natural and inalienable right, the law as it stands in by far the greater part of the country places her at a most unfair disadvantage. According to the Hindu Law, the joint family comprises only the male members ; a woman is not a co-partner, but a mere dependent, with no right of ownership in the joint property. Why do you allow yourselves to be menaced and led captive, as it were, by laws which were made for a society which differed from our own as much as chalk differs from cheese ? Manu and the rest of them made excellent laws for their own time, perhaps. But why should you take them as final pronouncements ? Are they the will of God ? Certainly not. They are statements of men’s thought or their prejudice. Indeed, when I think of the laws they made against women, they seem to write like men who have been bitten by some serpent, so poisonous is their attitude. Their laws seem almost to breathe hatred for us. How can I help thinking so, when the law, from birth to death, makes a woman a subordinate, stifles her, so to say,

in the cradle ; and then says : thus and thus shalt thou live ? Live ? The word in their mouths mocks us ! For, how can a woman live, when she is deprived of any vestige of freedom from the beginning ? First, we must bow before our fathers, then, our husbands, then husbands' relatives. Does it strike you as a just state of affairs ? Would you tamely sit down under a system of law that does not allow even to call your souls your own ? Is that true law or true religion ? I do not blame Manu, for, after all, it may be that he honestly did his best according to his lights. But those lights burn dim in the twentieth century India."*

Those are passionate pronouncements ; but they cannot be deprecated and dismissed as the ranting of wayward youth, corrupted by Western influence. There we have indisputable facts as against the fiction about the exalted position of women in Hindu Society. It goes without saying that the speaker is not a revolutionary. She would not advocate complete subversion of the feudal-patriarchal relationship which places upon women the disabilities so very scathingly condemned by herself. Nevertheless, she is far more progressive than most of our nationalist leaders who hold that the last word of human wisdom was pronounced by the legendary law-givers of ancient

* Address to the students of the Poona Law College, April 5, 1936.

India. She also is an admirer of Hindu culture ; but her admiration is not blind. She can see things in their historical perspective ; and that is the sensible manner of appreciating the positive values of past cultures.

Laws governing the relation between man and woman under the conditions of society thousand years ago, are not suitable to the circumstances of our time. To dispute this view is to deny history. Those laws might have been good in their time ; they were certainly useful for the circumstance of the social system of the epoch. But from that, it does not follow that they are good or even useful for ever. When social institutions become obsolete, they must be discarded. Those suffering from their continued existence, are bound to revolt. The advocates of progress must foment that historically necessary revolt. The Hindu system of marriage is an antiquated institution. Its usefulness has disappeared with the disruption of the patriarchal family. Whether in the past it was good or bad, is a question of social research. The question is of great importance for a critical appreciation of the ancient Indian culture ; but it is irrelevant for the purpose of solving the problem which faces us to-day. The question of to-day is what position women should occupy in a modern society. We are not living in the age of Manu. Modernisation of Indian society is a historical necessity. Consistent with this necessity,

can it hold on to traditional ideas and maintain old institutions which deprive women of elementary human rights ? In order to answer the question correctly, facts must be faced. The situation must be regarded realistically. Instead of doing that, they talk of mystic ideals of Indian womanhood. Since the position of women in Hindu Society cannot be justified in the face of indisputable facts, fictions are fabricated. But facts are the decisive factor. They shall carry conviction.

In the above quotation, we have a realistic picture of the social status of Hindu women. The facts cannot be denied. How do the admirers of the ideal of Indian womanhood answer the challenge which is all the more formidable because it comes from a conservative quarter ? In the face of these stark realities about the position of women in patriarchal families, they glorify this antiquated social institution.

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In his speech quoted above, Dr. Bhagwan Das, for example, defends the "Indian ideal of familyism" as against the individualism of the West ; and he dogmatically asserts that "our ideal is the best". It is surprising that the Indian critics of Western ideas, ideals and institutions should not care to learn something about their pet abomination. The family is the unit of society also in the West. The Western society is not composed of a multitude of individuals cutting each other's

throat. Individualism has not disrupted family as such. Some freedom for women, their partial liberation from the overlordship of men, repudiation of the dogma about the indissolubility of marriage, practice of divorce—all these shocking innovations have neither disrupted society, nor broken up the family.

The family is not the instrument for the realisation of any mystic or metaphysical ideal. It is an institution which rises with the creation of private property, and therefore remains the unit of society as long as society continues to be based upon private ownership. Only, its structure changes in course of the evolution of private property. Each form of private ownership is associated with a specific type of family. The Indian ideal of polygamous joint family is based upon the patriarchal property relations. If the practice of polygamy is declining, that is because of economic reasons which, in their turn, grow out of the decomposition of the patriarchal property relations constituting the foundation of joint family.

Western capitalist society is reared upon the foundation of monogamous family. So, the opposing ideals are not familyism and individualism. It is a matter of choice between two forms of family. The more backward type is proclaimed to be the Indian ideal. As the antithesis of individualism, familyism is a new name for the hoary institution of patriarchalism. The preference of

this ideal means endorsement of the subordination of woman to man. For, in a patriarchal joint family, as the Maharani of Baroda aptly puts it, women are not co-partners, but mere dependents. No amount of lyrical legends and mystic doctrines about fictitious ideals of spiritual partnership can hide the fact of actual subordination which, except in rare cases, amounts to veritable slavery. The ideal of Indian womanhood, then, is self-abnegation for the preservation of the patriarchal family which tolerates no individual right, nor freedom, even in the case of man.

The animus against individualism shows that the glorification of the ideal of Indian womanhood is dictated by a reactionary social philosophy. How can the aspirations of the modern woman be countenanced by those whose sentiments were expressed by Dr. Bhagwan Das, when he declared, "as an Indian I do not believe in individualism"? With all its apparent boldness, it is rather a damaging declaration to come from people who pretend to be fighting for the political liberation of India. It reveals the nature of their ideal of political freedom. Individualism is the philosophical foundation of political democracy. Representative Government, government responsible to the people, popular sovereignty—all these forms of political freedom derive their legal and moral sanction from the doctrine that the function of the State is to protect the rights and liberties of the indivi-

dual, that society is an aggregate of individuals, and should be so organised and administered as to provide each of its members the greatest possible freedom and opportunity for self-development. The rejection of individualism, therefore, implies opposition to political democracy. Those who philosophically and socially reject individualism cannot be honest advocates of democratic freedom. The defence of the ideal of Indian womanhood thus logically leads to a very compromising political position. Our striving for political freedom is not consistent with the apology for this fictitious ideal of Indian womanhood.

It is maintained by its protagonists that the mystic ideal of Indian womanhood can be realised only in the iron-frame of patriarchal family. The political administration of a society based upon patriarchal family cannot be democratic. It is not possible to remain faithful to any one particular ideal of old tradition. Each form of culture has a whole complex of ideals. Having a common economic background,—a specific form of property—they are interwoven ideologically. They must stand or fall together. Loyalty to the traditional social ideal would commit us to paternalism in politics. That is manifestly a reactionary ideal.

The economic problems of India—progressive pauperisation of the multitude and mass unemployment—could not be solved under a paternalistic State, even if that was national. Each type of

political State is based upon a particular form of property, and the possibilities of the economic development are limited by the established relationship of property. A paternalistic State is the bulwark of pre-capitalist property relation which sets a narrow limit to social productivity ; the masses are necessarily kept on a low level of living. The doctrines of simple living, virtuousness of poverty, sacrifice, self-control, so on and so forth, are the ideological super-structure of the pre-capitalist economy of scarcity. It is easy to see that the realisation of the reactionary ideal of a paternalistic State (Ramraj) would aggravate our economic problems, instead of solving them. As a matter of fact, these problems have resulted largely from the maintenance of the antiquated relations of property in the basic means of production (land). The present economic ruin of the country has been brought about by the fact that the British Raj is also a paternalistic State. If paternalism is detrimental to progress, it is much more so when exercised by a foster-father, who assumes the trust tempted by the wealth of the helpless ward.

However, the point is that paternalism cannot be the political ideal of the Indian masses, who must have democratic freedom as the essential condition for the introduction of measures which will open before them the road to progress and prosperity. Cultural and social ideals not consistent with this political ideal, must be discarded as

reactionary. That is not a matter of opinion or a question of choice ; it is a historical necessity. If the people of India are to work out their destiny, the bonds of traditional ideas and ideals must be broken. A people cannot be free, while denying liberty and equality, indeed, the barest of justice, to the women. The glorification of the ideal of Indian womanhood clearly represents such a denial.

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Yet, the deplorable fact is that a great many of our political leaders have no patience for the modern woman who demands economic rights, social emancipation and a single standard of sex-relation. While some combat these new-fangled Western ideas by holding high before the misguided the mystic ideal of Indian womanhood, there are others who do not make any bones about the true nature of that ideal, and presume to show the woman her place. Of course, they also rely on the authority of the wise men of the past, and hold up the light of ancient wisdom as the infallible guide for those who wish to avoid the pitfalls of the temptations of modern life. Only, in doing so, they burst the bubble of the ideal of Indian womanhood, because they tell frankly what, according to venerable traditions, really is the place of woman in Hindu society.

Having been sermonised by a modern Rishi, the meeting of the Delhi Women's League had the privilege of being lectured also by a modern

politician. It was Bhulabhai Desai who is known to be cynical about equality in any walk of life. An eulogising nationalist newspaper reported him to have administered "some bitter pills" to the naughty women who allow themselves to be influenced by modern ideas imported from the benighted West, and consequently turn away from the ideals set before them by the wise men of the past, particularly the immortal and infallible Manu.

Mr. Desai deprecated the "false issue of antagonism between men and women"; then he asserted that this "false issue has been falsely borrowed by India" from foreign quarters. Presumably, the assertion is that Indian social conditions do not provide any reason for the issue to arise. Such an assertion implies that in Indian society women are in no way subordinated to men, that the relation is so equitable and harmonious as to obviate the possibility of any antagonism. Disregarding all the facts about the realities of women's life, in the present as well as in the past, the speaker declared that "man has always placed woman on a higher and better status". Now, that is a legend pure and simple. Mr. Desai himself admitted that. He directly went on to describe the "higher and better status" which is supposed to be graciously granted to women by men, and with which the former should remain content. He exclaimed: "Don't fight a war of

revenge ; don't say 'I am a toy, a breeding machine' ; don't try to send men to the kitchen. Yours is the greatest profession in the world, in which nobody can compete with you. It is no use trying to play a thing you are not. Don't enter the arena of the struggle for existence which belongs to man."

This paternalism means denial of economic freedom to women. You cook for me, bear children to inherit my property, and I shall protect you. Of course, who does not take care of the means of production ? As regards the struggle for existence, no amount of benevolent, though interested, paternalism can keep women out of the fray. Only the fortunate few can keep their women in idleness. The great majority are caught in the vortex. They are not pet idols, but chattels. Desai tried to rationalise his doctrine of patriarchal servitude with the following argument : "They are different by nature. You cannot alter the creation of nature. A man will remain a man ; and so is the case of women." If there is any woman who wanted to have a physical transformation, that is a matter of Desai's personal knowledge. The question of sex equality does not involve such obvious absurdities. But it is a different proposition to sanction social inequality on the pretext of a difference of physical structure. Women want equality as human beings. We are told *ad nauseam* that Hindu

culture is based on the doctrine of equality of everything before God. Don't women have souls? Besides, the appeal to natural distinction is a double-edged sword. It would be equally reasonable to defend the doctrine of "White Man's Burden" with this appeal. If the male is entitled to protect the female thanks to the biological distinction, is it not equally reasonable for the white race to have a similar claim on the strength of the colour of their skin?

But there seem to be women in India, (marring her holiness with their Western perversity) who are not to be fooled by patriarchal protection or romantic deception. The President of the meeting, presumably to the horror of the distinguished preachers of the Indo-German ideals of womanhood, insisted that "it cannot be denied that women are kept in all sorts of bondage". With a subtle irony, which must have sounded as pleasing flattery to the egoistic evangelists, she said: "If all men were modern Rishis, there would be no women's movement."

We no longer need dig into the neglected store of ancient wisdom to find the Indian ideal of womanhood. We can find it in the accursed West itself, as represented, for example, by the Germany of the Kaiser or of Hitler. The imperial lord of the Germans placed before women the ideals of the *Kirche*, *Kueche*, *Kinder*—respectively meaning, Church (religion), house-keeping

and children. Under the ill-fated Republic, the German women turned their back on these traditional "Aryan" ideals. The lamentable forces of degeneration have been arrested by the Nazis, who have resurrected the Indo-German ideal of womanhood by their characteristic methods. Women have been sent back to the kitchen by the ordinance of the authoritarian State which recognises no individual right. That is also a striking example of Indian social philosophy, practised by the avowed enemies of democratic freedom. "Marry and multiply"—that is the order for women, not only in Hitler's Germany, but also in Mussolini's Italy. And those are the countries in which the vulgar materialistic features of modern Western civilisation have entirely eclipsed its human values. The war lords require a plentiful supply of cannon-fodder. For that purpose, women have been driven out of all other occupations. they must stay at home and breed children.

The ideal of Indian womanhood, instead of being spiritually inspired, is of such a materialistic nature that it can fit into the scheme of a social philosophy which incorporates the worst features of Western culture.

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To do justice to women, it should be noted with the strongest emphasis that the ideal was not conceived by themselves; it was set before them by men—by those "wise men of ancient

life"—moved by the vulgar materialistic considerations of their age. The conditions of the time compelled women to accept the position assigned to them. They had no alternative. In a society based upon patriarchal family, man is the lord and master. Deprived of all economic rights, the woman has to submit. Then, there was propaganda, in the form of religion, mythology and romantic literature, for justifying the economic subjugation of women, and glorifying their status of domestic chattel and breeding machines. Under those circumstances, women could be easily persuaded to believe in the ideals set before them. In course of time, their subordination to man, their expropriation, their social disfranchisement, their domestic slavery, their concubinage, assumed the appearance of voluntary self-abnegation, inspired by some mystic ideal of womanhood. The glittering gilt of their chains made the slaves happy in their servitude.

That was the Golden Age—of domestic harmony and social concord when there were no perverse women to demand economic freedom, to complain of being a toy, a breeding machine. Deluded by the legends of Sitas and Savitris, they all faithfully and efficiently performed their "natural" profession—to be religious (according to the dogmas of orthodoxy), to keep house and to procreate at the pleasure of man.

But that Golden Age is a thing of the past.

Its foundation, the patriarchal family, lays in ruins, to be cleared away so that a new social structure can be raised in its place. The great bulk of women still remain in the bliss of ignorance, entrenched in superstitions—that specific heritage of our “spiritual culture”. There are those who, though not favoured fully with the bliss, still continue with the time-honoured illusions as a matter of habit. But some have become conscious of the realities of their position at home as well as in society ; who have realised the fraudulent nature of the ideal haloed by tradition, glorified in romantic legends and sung in mystic lyrics. They are growing in number. The spread of modern education is not the only cause of the awakening. It is primarily due to the slow, but sure, decomposition of an antiquated social order, the scheme of the cultural superstructure of which necessarily included mystic ideals veiling the subordination of woman to the status of chattel.

Now that a growing number of women can no longer be deluded by mystic ideals, and demand to be treated as individuals capable of doing the thinking for themselves, the traditional overlordship is defended in a plain language, such as the “bitter pills” administered by Desai. If it is true that “man has always placed woman on a higher and better status”, how is the “hostility between them” to be explained ? The only plausible explanation will be want of appreciation and grati-

tude on the part of the woman. Even the stoutest opponent of the demands and aspirations of the modern woman would find it difficult to bring that manifestly false charge against Indian womanhood. Besides, "hostility between sexes" is a scare-crow. If there is any hostility, it is on the part of those very men who complain of the spirit. Being out of sympathy with the ideas and ideals of the modern woman, these old-fashioned males are naturally hostile to them. The fear of hostility on the part of women, of a revolt of the angels, of a "war of revenge", reveals a bad conscience on the part of men. Consciousness of the fact that women have been wronged for ages, makes them apprehensive of the possible growth of a spirit of vengeance on the part of the former.

Modern women, however, are rebelling not against men, but against certain social codes and economic disabilities which place them under the domination of the male. There is no sex-war. That is an absurd idea. There cannot be any antagonism between the sexes. Sex-impulse is a force that attracts. In sex-relation itself, there can never be any inequality, either party being equally indispensable. As a rule, women cannot do without men any more than the male can dispense with the female. Inequality is in the relation between man and woman, as social units. The revolt of the modern woman is not a revolt of the female against the male ; it is a revolt of one category of

social units against another ; of a group of the suppressed against the suppressor, rather against the conditions of their suppression,—those social and domestic conditions which do not correspond with the relation of natural equality of the sexes.

So, it was quite irrelevant to exclaim at a modern women's gathering, "Don't wage a war of revenge". But the speaker had a guilty conscience, which was evidenced by the following exhortation—"Don't say, I am a toy, a breeding machine". He did not deny the fact that his social philosophy reduced women to toys and breeding machines. On the contrary, he told his audience to be satisfied with the "higher and better status" which men had granted to women, to carry on "the greatest profession", in which no man could compete. What is that profession ? To bear children—to be breeding machines ! That, then, is the "higher and better status"—the real content of the mystic ideal of Indian womanhood. Because, in the opinion of the protagonist of that reactionary ideal, those Indian women, who would not be satisfied with the "greatest profession", were allured by "false ideals borrowed from the West". But the profession is not a grant of men ; nor have any normal women the least desire to abstain from it. In the frame-work of the patriarchal family—the type of family idealised by the Indian opponents of social progress—women perform their natural profession not as free agents,

but under conditions laid down for the convenience of men. Modern women revolt against those conditions, which deprive them of a freedom, theirs by birth-right.

There is no sex-war. The demand is for equality in sex-relation in society. When this natural right is denied, on the absurd plea that women did not miss it in the past, there is bound to be some bitterness. But the responsibility for that undesirable atmosphere belongs to the reactionary male, who cannot see, or will not see, that the demand grows out of a radical change in the economic position of women. The change is brought about by the inevitable breakdown of an antiquated system of social relations which unfortunately persisted in India much longer than in the more advanced countries.

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According to Indian tradition, the ideal of womanhood is to be realised in marriage, in the performance of the wifely duties, and in motherhood. But that only road to the realisation of their "legitimate" ideal is being closed to a growing number of women. Economic conditions are quickening the sense of justice and morality which revolts against the religiously sanctioned system of polygamy. To-day, few can afford to keep more than one wife. The lapse of the practice of polygamy is bound to create the problem of a surplus of marriageable mates. The problem may not as

yet be an actuality ; but it is there in embryo, and is casting its shadow in advance. The desire of modern women to be something more than wives and mothers grows out of that back-ground of the dissolution of a decayed social order. With not a few of them, the problem is actual. Simultaneously with the lapse of the practice of polygamy, marriage itself is becoming a difficult undertaking, a risky venture, for a large number of young men, particularly of the educated middle-class. Unemployment and the general economic bankruptcy naturally discourage the more prudent to assume the responsibility of maintaining a wife and raising a family. The joint family offers no protection to these social derelicts. For the expropriated and proletarianised lower middle-class, joint family exists only in form : it has lost all social significance.

With the disappearance of the common patrimony, joint family automatically dissolves itself. The effort to maintain it, when there is nothing to be owned jointly—that is to say, after its economic foundation has been blown up—places an extra burden on this or that individual, who bears it, not voluntarily, but as a habit of conforming with tradition. This makeshift is a shadow of the real thing. In the great majority of cases, the earning capacity of individuals being limited, the burden soon becomes simply unbearable. There is nothing more to be done than to break up the

skeleton of a dead system which can be yet for a time kept formally intact only by depressing the standard of living of an entire class of society. This inevitably happens when tradition compels one or two people to provide a subsistence for more than can be provided for with their individual earnings. The habit of adhering to the custom of a disrupted form of family has cost the middle-class very dear. It has contributed to the physical deterioration of the entire class. That is a tragedy—for the entire nation.

However, even with the greatest of goodwill, none can go very far with an unbearable burden. An elder brother may somehow manage to support and educate one or more younger brothers. But in most cases, it is simply beyond his capacity to maintain them with wives and children. The younger brothers are expected to contribute to the family exchequer by their earning. They cannot be dependent on the elder brother indefinitely. For themselves, that is a matter of shame ; for the latter an unbearable burden, carried too far. So, mass unemployment of the educated middle-class youths is bound to break up even the skeleton of joint family in that stratum of society. Generally, elder brothers undertake the responsibility of educating younger brothers, often prejudicing the future of their own children, as an investment. That is natural. Now that education does not guarantee employment, they will natu-

rally hesitate to invest their hard-earned money in an enterprise of such doubtful earning capacity. The marriage of young men on the expectation of their being able to earn before long will decrease. In a progressively increasing number, young men will find themselves in a position of indigent individuals outside the pale of the joint family: for them marriage will become out of question. Already, there are thousands in this precarious position. No unemployed young man of education, and with a sense of responsibility, would think of marrying and raising a family.

What is the other side of this picture? A large number of young men, unable to marry, means an equally large number of women deprived of the possibility of becoming wives and mothers. What are they going to do? There is no place for them in the traditional scheme of Hindu society. Polygamy cannot absorb them any longer. Very few people of their class can afford more than one wife today. Besides, this novel kind of outcastes belongs to the educated middle-class, themselves more or less educated. They would not be disposed of by some arbitrary arrangement sanctioned by religion and tradition; for example, to become *Devadasis* in temples or be formally married by dozens to some worthy man in death-bed. And even then, in the latter case, the glory of widowed wifehood would not make up for the fact of their being robbed of the

greater glory of motherhood. However, the fact happily is that they would not submit to any such inhuman and immoral treatment. They are rebels, potentially, if not actually. There are many among them who have become conscious of the fact that the new conditions of life are totally incompatible with the traditional social and domestic ideals. They are the furies of the women's movement, who are admonished for their new-fangled ideas imported from the West. But they are asking a question which arises from the facts of life they are bound to live. They want to be wives ; they want to be mothers. But they find their way to the fulfilment of those natural desires beset with difficulties which grow more numerous every day. A great many of the kind of men they would like to have for husbands are debarred from the venture of matrimony by economic disability. Prospective husbands, who would make excellent companions and desirable mates, may not be promising providers of material necessities. Therefore, under the given conditions of life, in order to be wives and mothers, women are compelled to be something more ; they must be fully enfranchised members of society, possessed of all the rights and responsibilities associated with that status. Otherwise, they cannot realise the natural ideals of womanhood.

In the absence of economic independence, supremacy in domestic affairs is a myth. Only as

fully enfranchised citizens can women really be the queens of homes. The natural ideals of womanhood are not incompatible with the greater ideals of the modern woman. It is idle to idealise home when to have a home is becoming a problem for a growing number of women. An ideal home can no longer be created by man alone. The privilege is reserved for the fortunate few who live on unearned income. But the great majority, particularly of the middle-class, are dependent on individual earning capacity which, in most cases, is quite insufficient for keeping even a small family on a tolerable standard of living. The way out of this difficulty is to broaden the basis of the co-operation between man and woman. If young people are to create pleasant homes and raise healthy families, women must share the economic responsibility. What are they to cook, when the larder is empty? What is the joy of motherhood, if their lives are to be tormented and embittered by the care of ill-fed children? If women are to share the responsibility, which hitherto has been man's, they cannot be denied the rights traditionally reserved for man. They are entitled, morally as well as legitimately, to economic independence. That means not only right of inheritance, which will be a mere legal formality in the case of the great majority. It means appearance of women in the departments of life hitherto closed for them. Their activities can no

longer be confined to the home. For the sake of making a home, worth the name at all, they must transcend the limits of domesticity. To-day, social equality of the sexes is necessary for the performance of their respective functions, which in the past could be done under a different relation. The recognition of woman as an individual member of society is necessary for the preservation of family, of course, in a different form. The new type of family, which is bound to replace the disrupted joint family, shall have to be a voluntary association of individuals, both the sexes having the same status as individual members of society.

Society originated as a voluntary association of individuals. But the old patriarchal family eclipsed the individual. A society which suppresses the individual runs contrary to its own historical purpose. The individual—man as well as woman—is prior, not only to family, but society itself, the latter being a creation and an association of individuals. Therefore, the assertion of the individual as the component of family is historically necessary; it is a progressive step which has to be taken under the pressure of the changed social conditions.

Independent economic activities on the part of women will necessarily mean some competition with men. But there will be no antagonism. For, generally, they will represent co-operation between the sexes on a larger sphere. As inde-

pendently functioning members of society, women will become full partners of men. There will be real companionship. Placed on a more secure economic foundation, the family will be an institution, happier and healthier than ever.

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The Indian critics of the Western women are ignorant of the fact that it is thanks to the extension of her activities outside the traditional sphere of the home, that the institution of family, undermined by capitalism, has been kept intact. The ignorant critics denounce divorce, but know nothing about the co-operation between man and woman in the modern countries of the West. The prevailing mass unemployment would have destroyed by starvation thousands and thousands of families but for the women's activity outside home. Masses of women act as bread-winner, when men are forced to remain idle. That kind of co-operation demands unstinted admission of equality of men and women as members of society. That is real partnership, which rejects the traditional notion of the division of labour, of distinct fields of activity appropriated respectively for the sexes. Real partnership is possible only when the relation between husband and wife ceases to be that of the protector and the protected.

Nor is it only in the West that masses of women are compelled to share the economic responsibility of keeping up the family, to function

as partners of men outside home. In India also, multitudes of women occupy a similar position ; only, they remain deprived of the right which should be theirs legitimately, in return for the economic responsibility they shoulder. They do labour, and consequently contribute to the family exchequer ; but they do not do so as independent individuals ; they are treated as beasts of burden. All women belonging to the lower classes, particularly the peasantry, are in that position. The glorious ideal of Indian womanhood is not for them. For the bulk of Indian womanhood, the ideal stands naked as chattel-slavery.

Therefore, Desai did not know what he was talking about, when he advised women not to "enter the arena of the struggle for existence which belongs to man". Whatever may be the wisdom of this advice, given by our modern Draco, it certainly has no sense for the majority of Indian women, who are deeply involved in the struggle for existence, have been so from time immemorial, even in the legendary Golden Age, not by choice, with any perverse spirit of antagonism, but out of stark necessity. Now, even the women belonging to the next higher stratum of society are being drawn in that struggle. Thanks to the break-down even of the precarious skeleton of the joint family, an increasingly large number of middle-class women are finding it difficult to have the traditional protection of husbands who, in return for that ques-

tionable privilege, could occupy the position of the lord and master of the family. When thousands of young men are defeated in the economic struggle for existence, for no fault of theirs, at least a corresponding number of women must look out for themselves. Middle-class women, in a progressively increasing number, shall be entering the arena of the struggle for existence, not by choice, but under compulsion. It is easy enough to warn them off; but what is the alternative? The kind concern for keeping the "weaker sex" out of the vicissitudes of the economic struggle for existence, may sound very magnanimous. But only the naive will be deceived by such cheap demagoguery. The cynically minded easily see the significance of such modern paternalism. It is a denial of economic freedom to women. What the women are told, in effect, is: "You keep house for men, bear them children to inherit their property, and they will protect you; if you happen to be fortunate enough, you may even be pampered." In other words, the women are enjoined to be breeding machines, and per chance toys in exceptional cases; but not to complain. Because, that is their natural function. The cat is out of the bag.

The crucial question, however, is: How many women in contemporary India can have even the questionable privilege of the benevolent protection of man? How many men can honestly and confidently offer such protection? Very few in either

case. That is a fact, and that fact alone is going to revolutionise the relation between man and woman, to compel the recognition of women, no less than that of men, as individuals, to promote the rise of a new type of family on the ruins of the old which, doomed by history, cannot be saved by simple idealisation.

The great bulk of women, those belonging to the labouring classes, have never enjoyed the privilege, although they paid the price, and more. They have always been, not only housekeepers and breeding machines, but also beasts of burden, never toys. Thus, more than ninety per cent of the Indian manhood is not entitled to take up the paternalistic attitude towards women. They nevertheless do. That is the heritage of patriarchal culture. A palpable untruth has become a matter of current belief. Not only men tell the lie; women also believe in it. In either case, it is a matter of habit. Prejudice, fostered through ages by religion, and fortified by ignorance, makes them blind to the stark realities of daily life.

Now, the middle-class also is sinking down to the position of the masses living on manual labour. An increasingly large number of its male members find themselves unable to offer economic security to women. So, the traditional protective or paternalistic attitude towards women remains a practical proposition only for the thin upper stratum of society—for those fortunate few who

mostly live on unearned income or are engaged in well paid professions. Apart from the intrinsic injustice and immorality of this old-fashioned attitude, it is idle to defend a relation that does not exist in reality, to hold up an ideal which cannot be reached, to advise women to remain content under male protection which, to the great majority of them, is no longer available. The reality of the situation is obscured by a fiction, and this is done purposely. The unrealisable ideal of paternalism is held up with the purpose of placing the modern women in the wrong, for maintaining that there is no legitimate ground for their discontent which is ascribed to their being lured by "false ideals borrowed from the West".

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The desire of women to stand economically on their own feet, however, is a native growth. The legitimate ground for the desire always existed, the vast bulk of women having never been really dependent on men economically. Always as now, they have shared with men extra-domestic labour ; but they were never allowed any proprietary right over the produce of their labour which legally belonged to men—the lords and masters of the family. When women are compelled to perform labour of economic value, they are legitimately entitled to share the ownership with men. The demand for the economic independence of woman is not a new-fangled idea ; it is a demand for the

redress of a wrong done to them throughout the ages. In addition to this perennial cause for the revolt of women, affecting them as an entire social group, there are new causes. These are also native; they generate in the dissolution of the joint family and the general economic distress of the middle-class.

The historically caused and socially necessary revolt of women, therefore, is not a nuisance created by some middle-class women corrupted by Western ideas. Though they are naturally occupied immediately with their own particular problems, these women, however, give expression to the long-standing grievance of the dumb masses of their sex. The problems confronting the middle-class women particularly cannot be solved without a radical reconstruction of society. Because, the problems originate in the decay of the established social order which, for ages, treated the vast bulk of women as beasts of burden. Thus, objectively, the educated women rebelling against the ideals of Indian womanhood, are demanding a social revolution. No wonder that they are rebuked by the orthodox nationalists. But while condemning the "false ideals" of the modern woman, the defenders of the Indian ideal only expose the real nature of the latter.

The reactionaries say that the emancipation demanded by the misguided modern women would mean the disruption of home life, and

bring about social chaos. They misrepresent the idea of the freedom of sex-relation. Their stock argument is that nature has made woman different from man ; so, there can be no equality between them. Desai, for example, informed his audience: "You cannot alter the creation of nature. A man will remain a man, a woman a woman." As if anybody ever disputed this truism. No woman wants physical transformation. The demand is not for manhood ; it is for human rights, for the abolition of man-made codes and conditions that do not allow women to develop as individual human beings ; it is for the creation of such a social and domestic atmosphere as will enable women to act freely in the capacity of partners and companions of men.

Here is a clear statement of what the modern woman really strives for : "The women's movement has set to it the task of removing all sex-inequality wherever it exists, so as to bring that happy day of consummation nearer. All sex-discrimination must go wherever it may exist, and as a logical consequence of that, all exploitation must cease. That is the burden of the message of the Women's Conference."*

What is the happy day which has become the ideal of the modern Indian woman ? Let her

* (Presidential Address by Mrs. Brijlal Nehru to the annual meeting of the Delhi Women's Conference, November 8, 1936.)

describe, in order to dispel the bogey of sex-war : "The commonest misunderstanding is that the movement is supposed to create a rift between men and women by bringing into play a spirit of sex-rivalry, sex-competition and sex-war. It is argued that, instead of bringing about peace and harmony into an already distracted world, the movement creates new issues leading to dissensions between the two parts of humanity which are destined to live together a unitary life, and without whose co-operation the world cannot exist. To give this interpretation to the movement is to deny its objective, which is not to set woman against man, but to bring about peace and harmony and true co-operation between the two."

Who would fall foul of this objective, and yet claim to be the upholder of a noble ideal of womanhood ? Perhaps the Indian apologist would contend that that exactly is the ideal of Indian womanhood. Well, the fact is that it is not. Let the testimony come from experience.

"Men and women have no doubt lived their lives together all over the world and at all time, but they have not lived together the lives of true companionship. There might have been a dead peace in their relationship, but that peace has not been the peace of life and harmony. There has been, from time immemorial, a spirit of superiority and inferiority in the relation between man and woman, of exploitation of woman by man. This

spirit is manifest in the customs and manners, in the rules and laws, of our country. It has vitiated the relationship of the two, and has been the cause of inhuman exploitation and has retarded human progress. True peace and harmony and real companionship between man and woman can exist only when the relation rests upon equality and justice. As long as there is the slightest idea of the master and the dependent, of the superior and the inferior, in the heart of men or in their customs and their practice and laws, the consummation of human bliss and evolution, which can be found in perfect harmony and co-operation between man and woman, cannot be achieved.”*

In the Hindu family, the woman is dependent. The ideal of womanhood does not change that ; it is a mere myth. Laws as well as practices are all full of the spirit of inequality and injustice. The natural equality of sexes can be re-established through the problematical revival of polyandry. Dogmatic defenders of justice and equality should demand that right for women, if the privileges enjoyed by men under Hindu law are not to be abolished. But polyandry will surely break up the family. That was the established custom once upon a time. But no modern woman demands its revival. What is demanded is a freedom of choice, the right to separate when there is no har-

* Ibid.

mony. In the last analysis, economic freedom is the basic demand. That is the only way out of the impasse created by the break-down of an old social order. Justice as well as general social welfare demands the establishment of that freedom on the part of women. Indeed, the freedom demanded by the modern woman alone can prevent the dissolution of the family as a necessary social institution, and head off the danger of a social chaos. The modern woman does not want to create social chaos. She has been thrown in the midst of one. She is only trying to get out of it. Let her not be handicapped by the load-stone of the fictitious ideal of Indian womanhood, tied around her neck.

CHAPTER III

CRIME AND KARMA

IN prison, one naturally feels the absence of freedom more acutely, and for the philosophically inclined, the problem of freedom presents many interesting aspects. For example, there are prisoners—quite a lot of them—who like to be in jail. They corroborate the story that an old man committed suicide when he was released from a long term of imprisonment. There is nothing perverse in their mentality. After a long term of imprisonment, one comes out completely a misfit to the surroundings outside. For having been in jail, he is regarded as an out-caste. The struggle for life becomes for him much more difficult than previously. That being the case, it is quite natural for long-term prisoners, having nothing very particular attractive for their life outside, to get reconciled to the idea of living their entire life in jail, where at least the bare necessities of physical existence are available to all and sundry. There are other prisoners who do not mind being in jail, although they may prefer to be outside. There is still another sort who do not seem to feel the loss of freedom very acutely. In them, the spiritual callousness produced by the vicissitudes of life attains almost philosophical detachment.

Freedom, of course, is a relative concept, always and everywhere. It is limited by the circumstances of life. One is free in so far as he can control those circumstances. Man's superiority over other animals consists of the ability to exercise this control to an ever increasing extent. But the biological advantage is not realised to any appreciable degree, except in favourable social conditions. Indeed, under adverse social circumstances, man possesses much less freedom than lower animals, notwithstanding his biological superiority. This tragic fact of human existence is explained in India by the doctrine of *karma*. This is a doctrine of social slavery.

For five years and more, I lived among about two thousand prisoners. They represented practically all the strata of Indian society, except the top most ones. The great majority of them were in jail for crimes committed under the pressure of adverse circumstances, in which the bulk of Indian people live. Those circumstances are not created by them. They did not choose to live in circumstances that breed crimes. Yet, there were few among those victims of adverse social conditions who did not believe that it was their fate to be in jail. The more sophisticated ones ascribed their sorrow and suffering to *karma* or the Will of God. Fatalism represents the popular conception of the law of *karma*.

According to this doctrine, everyone must

enjoy the fruits of good action and be punished for the evil. The causal consequence may not be evident in the same life. The doctrine of reincarnation is the counterpart of the doctrine of *karma*. Yet, the highest ideal of Indian spiritualism is *nishkam karma*—to work unconcerned with the result. How can one be unconcerned with that which must happen to him irrespective of his will? Here is a contradiction between free will and determinism. If the law of *karma* is to be interpreted not as an expression of popular superstition, then it implies the acceptance of the principle of determinism. Providential Will is excluded from this scheme. The future of anyone is determined by his present actions, and these again have been determined by his acts in the past. Another ideal of Indian spiritualism is to regard this chain of the law of *karma* as a vicious circle, and to endeavour to find a way out to salvation. This ideal is set forth most authoritatively in the Gita.

“I do not do any work (do not act) for the result. I am neither friend to some or foe to others. I have given enough (what is necessary or what is deserved) to everyone in my creation. Therefore, whoever knows me in this form (character) and, working not for the result, tries to be like myself, he becomes free from all bondage.”

If this scriptural injunction is read together with the doctrine of *karma*, either the latter is

invalidated, or an unattainable ideal is placed before the aspirant for spiritual salvation. If the law of *karma* is immutable, then, one may do good deeds without wishing the result, yet he shall necessarily enjoy the fruits of those deeds. He may go to the Heaven, and there is no freedom even in Heaven. Regarded as a determinist law, the doctrine of *karma* renders the ideal of freedom unattainable. Consequently, it militates against the higher ideal of *nishkām karma*. But there is some sense in this apparent madness. The two seemingly contradictory ideals supplement each other for forging the chain of social slavery for the masses. The doctrine of *karma* teaches everyone to be reconciled to his fate. But, on the other hand, it may make him to be more discriminating about his acts in the present and in the future. The failure to be rewarded for meritorious acts naturally discourages conformity with the established standards of virtuosity and good behaviour. Therefore, a higher ideal is set up, so that one may not hanker after the reward, and behave in the prescribed manner permissible for the maintenance of the established social order.

However, there is no use trying to make the prisoners see that they are not in jail entirely for their fault, that the "crimes" for which they are punished, in most cases, are committed under the pressure of circumstances not created by themselves and beyond their control. The social background

of the crimes committed by the great majority of prisoners can be easily indicated. It is so very palpable. Theft and robbery, for example, are as a rule committed under the pressure of poverty. Even the so-called "professionals" ultimately are victims of social iniquity.

Stories about the famous robber-chief Sultana are very popular among the prisoners. He has been raised to the status of a minor mythical hero. In the stories, he is depicted as a sort of Robin Hood. And it is not the heroic touches, but the social significance, of Sultana's reported exploits that appeal to popular imagination. Sultana's popularity is not confined to the prisoners. It is wide-spread among the rural population outside. Therefore, it took the police such a long time to capture him and break up his gang. I came across only one prisoner who, after his conviction for premeditated murder, had been instrumental in the capture of Sultana. He was a Brahmin landlord with some modern education and very proud of his "aristocratic" lineage.

The members of Sultana's gang, like the majority of professional high-way robbers, were recruited from the village poor. It was thanks to the sympathy and secret aid of the rural destitute that Sultana's gang defied detection for such a long time. Indian dacoits are not like the American gangsters. They are not bred out of the corrupt

background of ill-gotten wealth, but are brutalised by the pure fire of poverty.

In the years covered by the observation recorded here, the number of prisoners convicted for dacoity as well as theft kept on increasing. Those were the years (1931-1936) of aggravated impoverishment of the peasantry, and pauperisation of a considerable section of the rural population owing to the catastrophic fall of agricultural prices in consequence of the world economic crisis. The income of the peasantry, already hardly enough for bare subsistence, declined by half. On the other hand, prices of manufactured articles were artificially kept up by protective tariffs, and high customs duties levied for budgetary purposes. The consequent great disparity between the prices of what they bought and what they sold further contracted the peasants' already limited capacity to buy. Pauperisation of the bulk of the peasantry contributed to the destitution of the other productive classes of the rural population, namely, the artisans. It also ruined the petty village trader.

That was a fertile field for "crimes" of violent nature. Police reports showed alarming increase of the cases of high-way robbery, dacoity and violence against the money-lenders and landlords. Popular poverty plus high taxation always give birth to banditry which is the symptom of a deep-seated social crisis. Given a highly organised State apparatus, "law and order" can be main-

tained by coercion and repression. But the process of social dissolution cannot be arrested. Prisons present a true picture of the situation in the country.

How does such a precarious system still stand? The answer is found in the mentality—philosophy of life, if you please—of the victims of the system. The undermined system is guaranteed not so much by political coercion as by spiritual oppression. The fundamental guarantee is provided by cultural traditions which constitute a secure foundation of the political order of repressive laws. The law of *karma* reinforces the laws of the Imperialist State. The belief in providential preordination serves as the safety-valve for the maintenance of the decayed politico-economic order of colonial exploitation, superimposed upon feudal-patriarchal social relations.

This is not the first time in the history of India that fatalism or religious prejudice on the part of the masses is assuring continued existence of a bankrupt socio-political system. In the “Golden Age” of ancient India, the masses also starved, and suffered from all sorts of misery. There is plenty of evidence to this effect to be found in the *Mahabharat*, for instance.

Barahamihir, for example, describes a conversation between two men in a sad plight. One, voicing the spirit of revolt, naturally engendered by intolerable oppression, says: “We are suffer-

ing for the ill-doings of our King". Thereupon, the other, representing the true spirit of Indian culture, replies : "That is not true ; our suffering is the fruit of our own actions in the past life." The doctrine of *karma*, the belief in the transmigration of soul, here stands revealed in its real significance. These doctrines of "spiritualist" philosophy were expounded by the *Rishis* of the old with the object of making the masses feel themselves responsible for their misery, and thus be reconciled to it. The attitude of the second man exonerates the oppressors from all responsibility, and the established social order is guaranteed against the danger of a threatening popular revolt.

This attitude still dominates the mentality of the Indian masses. Those inclined to assume an ostentatious air of religiosity devoutly demonstrate resignation to the will of God. The former are sincere in their superstition ; they live blissfully in unadulterated ignorance. The latter, on the contrary, are usually consummate hypocrites. My experience with prisoners has been that the more ostentatiously religious a man, the greater a rogue he is. And in view of the fact that a Central Prison is a fairly representative replica of the entire country, I maintain that my experience provides a reliable ground for generalisation.

I picked up a stray kitten and brought it up. The way in which she was differently treated by different prisoners was a matter of interesting

observation. The poor animal was invariably well treated by the "hardened criminals". Having never had the experience of kindness, these were kind. Usually, I found the "habitual criminal" to be a simple soul with spontaneous nobility hidden under a superficial callousness. I regarded the attitude towards the cat as a tangible measure of the real nature of the man. Those always invoking the *Paramatma*, or given to some other form of religious demonstration, were invariably cruel and mean. The devout Hindu would mechanically exclaim "Rama Rama" to see the cat catch a squirrel or a bird or even a mouse, which latter, by tradition, is her legitimate prey. But he would give the poor animal a good beating if he ever caught her anywhere near his food.

Theft is a greater crime than murder. That is human ethics. Murder—of the kind for which people are punished by law—is a petty matter, being violence only against individuals. Theft is a different thing. It is attack upon the very foundation of society, namely, private property. But I am a believer in the morality of theft. It represents a challenge to the immoral social order which makes "criminals" of innocent men, and then punishes them for no fault of theirs.

Habitual juvenile thieves were my particular friends. They are highly interesting subjects of psychological study. As human material, they are equally fascinating. Their philosophy of life is

simply marvellous. They really enjoy life, and regard it as a great joke, though in reality it is anything but that. What to a superficial observer or a supercilious moralist appears to be criminal callousness, is really a sublime philosophical indifference to the conventional values of life. The expert pick-pocket, for example, is not so much concerned with what he picks. He is proud of his skill. He relishes the joy of plying his trade skilfully. And he looks upon his victims as so many fools. He does not steal, but pulls the leg of the society which has thrown him to the scrap-heap, and to the tender mercies of the police.

These jolly members of the brotherhood of gamins are the only honourable exceptions to the general rule of fatalist resignation, either sincere or pretended. They do not submit to, but defy, fate. They have no fear for prison. Why should they? Only in prison they are given those most minimum necessities for bare physical existence that are denied them anywhere else. Outside the jail, they are "free" to go hungry, to get wet in the rains, to shiver in the winter and to be eventually picked up by the police. Asked why he comes back to jail always after his release, one of my particular friends gave the disarming and thoroughly convincing answer: "Freedom does not fill my stomach, and the police do not let me alone." And he added with a charming candour that he was glad that they did not. Two full

meals a day, a dry place to sleep, blankets in the cold season—these are preferable to “freedom” to starve, for a change. And, fortunately, for those who need it so badly the change is not left to the chance. The police are there to look after it that they get it regularly. The life of these boys being so very well determined by the very nature of their existence as the ugly symptom of a rotten social system, they know neither God, nor *karma*, nor even fate. More correctly, fate is such a stark reality for them, that they have no occasion to speculate about it.

CHAPTER IV

WHY MEN ARE HANGED

The following few cases, selected at random from among the inmates of five prisons, clearly reveal the social background on which "crimes" are committed in India. Everywhere crime is a social phenomenon. Crimes are committed not against society by individuals who are punished as criminals. They are crimes of the society. The victims of social injustice are punished by the rules of society. Since crime is the ugly bastard of social injustice, its forms are largely determined by the specific social structure of the country. The cases I have selected are typically Indian. They could be committed only in the peculiar social atmosphere of this country. Placed under different social environments, these men and women would not be hanged or otherwise punished. The motive of crimes committed by them springs from the established relations and traditional taboos of Indian society. It is to be traced not to human nature, but to Indian nature, which is the product of the Indian mode of living, and is dominated by the Indian mode of thought.

A

It was a bright lad, hardly above twenty, born of a high-caste family of small landowners. His

parents had done the unprecedented thing of sending him to study in a college. In quest of the benefit of higher education, he had to go far away from his native village in the hill regions of Kumaun to some large town. A couple of years in circumstances so very different from those of his native place had unsettled the emotional life of the impressionable youth. He had returned home, not so much with new ideas as with awakened impulses and desires which, in the atmosphere of his native village, could not but lead to disaster. I saw him under the sentence of death, awaiting execution resignedly, if not quite cheerfully. For, as he declared himself with tragic frankness, was he not going to atone for his sin? It was operation of the inscrutable will of God—of the inexorable law of *karma*. That was his own explanation.

What was the crime for which he was hanged? He had fallen in love; and, having lived his adolescence in the unsettling atmosphere of new-fangled ideas, was partially free from the inhibition against the physical basis of the emotion. Of course, sex-impulse was still a matter of shame to him, as with the vast majority of Indian youths, notwithstanding their modernism in other respects. And, unfortunately, thanks to the social atmosphere of the village, it drove him towards something still more shameful. He committed, or nearly did, incest.

FRAGMENTS OF A PRISONER'S DIARY

The difference is of little significance, and need not be factually established. The point is that he was driven that way, because, under the given conditions, there was no other channel open for his emotions to flow and his natural impulse to be satisfied. Instead of stopping to think how such unnatural, immoral and sinful development could take place, the village, of course, was not only scandalised, but enraged. Fierce conflict of two powerful emotions, love and shame, must have driven the boy to a state of hysteria verging on madness. The stark impossibility of ever being able to escape merciless social persecution evidently made him desperate. Utterly helpless and hopeless, he revolted, and killed his beloved—to spare her a whole life of shame and resulting destitution. He did not kill himself, because he wished to atone for his sin. Having sent his beloved where no cruelties of this world could reach her, he delivered himself up to the police, and eventually walked to the gallows, not repentent, but resigned—the hero of a heart-breaking tragedy.

He had fallen in love with his own sister, recently widowed in the bloom of youth. Oh, what a horrible, disgusting affair! The moral sense of people with any decency cannot but be outraged by such lewdness. But thank God, such loathsome, unnatural incidents are very rare. Indian culture and social codes exclude the possibility of the occurrence of such revolting

moral depravity and sexual looseness. But don't be carried away by moral indignation. Ponder over the facts of the case, and the deplorable situation in which such tragedies happen may appear to you in an altogether new light.

The youth was sent to the town for education. Evidently, he was expected to learn something that could not be learned in the village. It was not his fault that he had lived up to the expectation. One cannot breathe in the atmosphere of modern education, however defective, half and half, so to say: Take in so much as necessary to be a clerk or a minor official or a lawyer or a medical practitioner, and shun the rest as a source of corruption. In any case, a town is entirely different from a small village. For good or evil, (I believe it is for the good), the mentality of the body of Indian students in higher educational institutions is in a flux. The belief in traditional values, moral as well as social, is greatly shaken, though far from being overcome as yet. New ideas and strange ideals are agitating the youth—of both the sexes. No impressionable adolescent could live in such an atmosphere without being carried away by the spirit of the time, if not as yet positively of revolt. The inevitable disturbance of ideas and emotions is bound to be all the greater in cases of those who come to this atmosphere of partial freedom and incipient revolt suddenly, having lived until then in the placid

backwaters of the remote village. The hero of our tragedy was one of such cases. In the town, he saw things not to be seen in his native place. He heard voices that had not reached him before. He allowed himself to be influenced by the strange sights he saw and disturbing voices he heard. Why should he not? Had he not been sent to the city to learn precisely what could not be learned in his village? Thus, after two years, he returned home, not indeed fully possessed of modern education, but with some new notions about life.

Naturally, the young man would find the life in the village rather dull. There was no excitement, no romance, no movement, not even expectation. All channels for venting his newly awakened emotions closed, he took to brooding. The condition of his sister, a commonplace of callous disregard, provided him with food for thought. A part of his education in the town had been to be conscious of the sex-impulse. That being a lesson taught by nature, he would have learned it anywhere. Two years in the atmosphere of semi-modernism had only encouraged him to be honest, at least to himself, if not to others. Most probably, he still regarded his willing response to the irresistible call of nature as a shameful thing to do. Yet, presumably, his modern education had gone to the extent of making him admit to himself, perhaps with great reluctance, that he could

not deny feeling the impulse. That much education would make him realise the difficulty of the tragic life to which his sister had just been condemned for no fault of hers.

So damnably callous is our social cruelty that fathers well past middle-age keep on diligently at the marital duty totally oblivious that widowed daughters or daughters-in-law, still in the bloom of youth, are made also of flesh and blood, and consequently might find it extremely difficult to live up to the ideal of virtuous renunciation forcibly set to them. The traditional taboo on the frank admission of sex-impulse makes the unthinking herd unconscious of the cruelty they callously commit. Partially awakened from the moral coma, the young man saw that his sister was also young and as such could not help feeling the exigencies of youth, although she was compelled to pretend that she did not.

In such a tragic situation, it would be but natural for a brother, no longer quite an unquestioning conformist with all the stupidities of village life, to come to the aid of the distressed sister. In the town, he had seen young women going about more freely than in the village. He had seen them taking interest in things, forbidden, or unknown to, or beyond the reach of, the rural women-folk. He had seen that life, less restricted by old social customs and prejudices, made women more cheerful. He thought that some occupation

more congenial and distractive than domestic drudgery might lift a little the dreadful gloom hanging over his sister's life. He began teaching her to read and write ; and, while imparting the inmost rudiments of it, talked more about the benefit of modern education. The family, of course, did not look upon the procedure very kindly. According to tradition, the girl, in her state, should not take interest in anything of this world ; she should devote herself to the sacred memory of the dead husband and to the service of the living relatives. However, not much attention was paid to the matter in the beginning. Let the unfortunate creature be consoled a bit. The whole life was still ahead of her,—to work out her *karma*. Besides, thanks to his "high" education, and particularly his sojourn in the town, the young man had acquired a certain amount of authority even in the eyes of the elders.

Before long, the next step was taken. The girl was persuaded to accompany her brother out of the house ; the two were often seen walking rather happily in the neighbouring fields and woods. What an unpardonable thing on the part of a widow ! To be happy ! When she had just been condemned by Providence to a life of mourning, sorrow, privation and service ! But the fat was in the fire. The young man had told the girl everything he had seen, heard and learned in the town. She avidly drank of the fascinating picture

so very very different from the drab life she had lived, and the dreary and dreadful life that still had to be lived. She dreamed of freedom—of a life with some meaning. And to the youth, life is identical with love.

They planned to go to some city together—to see more, to learn more and—to live freely as they could never do in the village. They themselves did not know what they exactly meant or wanted. Perhaps they did not mean anything which would make them more than brother and sister. Perhaps they did. In any case, it would be quite natural for them to be sexually attracted, that is to say, fall in love. The young man had returned home with awakened sex-impulse, and no longer quite ashamed of admitting the desire to himself. As a matter of fact, very few normal beings are. The pretension is hypocritical. Back to the village, he might have relapsed into the habit of inhibition or taken to something much worse—self-abuse, sodomy or clandestine sex-intercourse under sordid conditions. Negative morality, imposed by our social conditions, frequently encourages these practices which are worse than immoral, because they are physically harmful, aesthetically revolting, and corrupt the emotional life of the youth, making them vulgar, often vicious, and generally hypocritical. Fortunately as well as unfortunately, there was his sister who, thanks to her own misfortune, provided him with

a channel for his youthful emotion to flow normally. It seems that she responded. The call of nature was irresistible.*

One hears so much about human nature that never changes. The fact, however, is that the desire to love and be loved is the only constant of human nature. And the foundation of this essence of what is called human nature is biological. You can disassociate love from sex just as much as you quench thirst without drink, or satisfy hunger without food. Love, of course, is not limited to sex relations. But primarily, it is nothing more sublime or mysterious than emotional reflex of the urge of an organism to reproduce itself. Emotions, however noble or sublimated, are physical urge, in the last analysis. Therefore, normally, when psychological inhibitions and social taboos are absent or swept away by extraordinary combinations of circumstances, love breaks the bonds of sublimated hypocrisy, and not always successful self-deception.

* For the benefit of those who may be morally scandalised, even if sympathetically inclined towards the unhappy victims of social cruelty, it may be mentioned that incest is really not so much revolting to human nature as it is generally believed to be. The famous anthropologist Sir J. G. Frazer is of the opinion that incest was declared to be such a dreadful sin and so strict taboos were placed for its prevention, precisely because of the general tendency towards it. He came to the conclusion by exhaustive studies of human behaviour under all conditions.

Youth cannot help attracting and being attracted by youth. Segregation succeeds at the cost of sincerity ; sexual chastity, bought at such a high price, is spurious. As a matter of fact, segregation breeds exactly those vices it is meant to check. It encourages promiscuity, which often amounts to incest. Forced widowhood plus segregation puts a premium on incest. This is not an inferential assertion. It is a matter of fact. Have the courage to look ugly reality in the face, lift the veil of cant that carefully covers the skeleton in the cup-board, stop whitewashing lies, dig for the truth, and you will be shocked to find ample verification of this statement. I have actually heard people, not altogether illiterate and uncultured, justify the practice committed, of course clandestinely, in their own house-hold with the argument that the scandal had better be kept at home. Incest, after all, is not so unnatural as it is generally held to be. The priesthood of Gaya, for example, is a strictly inbreeding community. As a matter of fact, incest is a natural inclination. No less an authority than the great anthropologist, Sir James G. Frazer, is of the opinion that precisely because of the strong general inclination towards incest, it is so severely punished by communities with greater possibility of such intercourse. Love being a law of nature, brothers and sisters cannot help being lovers when, in the critical period of adolescence, they are thrown upon

themselves either by the clannishness of primitive people, or by the spiritual taboos of civilised society. That is exactly what happened to set the stage for the tragedy here recorded.

The young man went to the gallows because he had done the only honourable thing that he could possibly do under the circumstances, utterly beyond his control, if the girl he loved, either as sister or sweet-heart, was not to be driven out into a callous world, which would accommodate the derelict only as a forced vendor of herself. How painful facts of immorality result from the sanctimonious fictions of moral indignation ! The unfortunate girl could not live in the village. She was sure to be thrown out by her parents, who would not dare protect her, even if they cared to. She would not be given another chance even to make good her widowhood. A widow, caught in the act of violating her obligatory virtue, or even suspected publicly of doing so, can expect no mercy from the draconian codes of our society. The facade of purity must not be soiled. What is punished, is not immorality, but revolt against, or disregard for, the established conventions. Even the lack of sufficient fear for this is an unpardonable offence. The poor girl could not possibly remain in the village. Where could she go ? How could she live ? These questions did not bother her persecutors,—those passionate admirers of the sublime ideal of widowhood, those stern defenders of a

social system that breeds hypocrisy in the name of morality. But the moral society would not guarantee her the barest subsistence, unless she was ready to pay for that privilege. If she sold herself, she could even have a life of luxury as long as she would have her youth to sell. In orthodox Hindu society, the woman can live only by selling herself either in wedlock or in the open market. Is it moral to drive a girl to prostitution, the only alternative to suicide open to her under the given conditions, simply because she failed to obey social laws that violate the law of nature ?

The young man passionately believed that it was not. The murder of the girl was a desperate protest against the tyranny of a callous society. That was the crime for which he was hanged.

B

The next case can be regarded as the sequel—not directly, but taxonomically. If the murder was not committed as it was done in the case just described, it would most probably be committed in a different form, at a latter stage of the social tragedy. If the denouement is postponed, it takes place later ; the tragedy ends with a scene in which the major role is differently played by a different person.

This is the case of a young widow, convicted, not indeed to death, but to a long term of imprisonment, for having strangled her child at birth.

The shocking act was so obviously involuntary, done in utter despair, that the judge, while sentencing the accused according to the letter of the law, recommended her for mercy. I do not know if the mercy was granted.

She came from an ordinary peasant family. After the death of her husband, she had been living with his people as is customary in such cases. Only in well-to-do families, young widows can have the poor consolation of returning to their parents instead of being forced to live with strange people with whom they have no longer any connection, and who usually treat them as beasts of burden, not even kindly, they being regarded as embodiments of misfortune. For some tortuous reason, young widows are held responsible for the untimely death of their husbands, and consequently, also for the material loss suffered by the families concerned. Death of able-bodied male youths amounts to considerable material loss for joint families living mostly on the proceeds of the labour of their own members. Widows are held responsible for the calamity, because it was their fate to be widowed. The families, into which they are married, not by their choice (that little fact is not taken into consideration), are adversely affected by their bad luck, which is the result of their own sins. The belief is that a particular youth would not have died, thereby causing material loss to his parents, had he not been married to a girl destined

to early widowhood. It would be equally reasonable to believe that the young man died because it was his fate to die prematurely, and the girl suffers for no fault of hers. However, that is not done ; the blame is laid at the door of the widow, and she must pay the penalty. Indeed, sometimes young widows are treated as if they had actually killed their husbands. They are often called witches who have devoured their unlucky husbands.

Among the working peasants, women cannot be segregated. Purdah, where it is observed, is rather a matter of formality. There, sex morality is not meticulously dressed up, as among the upper classes, in rigid social conventions and high-sounding phrases. It stands out naked as jealousy and possessiveness. The wife belongs to the husband ; social morality demands that his proprietorship should be respected by others who are entitled to reciprocal consideration for their rights. Jealousy is outraged sense of ownership. It is righteous indignation against trespass. The chastity of women in general, that is, their sexual subordination to particular men they are respectively allotted to, is protected as the collective possession of the male. Such a rustic sense of sex morality, in the necessary absence of segregation, except as a mere formality, is bound to make room for what is called illicit intercourse. Conventions are there ; but not cant, which is immensely more powerful, since it influences the victims of sex subjugation

psychologically, thus transforming the coerced into voluntary, convinced, even enthusiastic conformists. Moral cant is absent among the lower classes, because they lack the cultural attainment which is the condition for that virtue.

Such was the social and moral atmosphere in which this particular woman lived. As long as she gave her keepers sufficient satisfaction as a beast of burden, they were not any too watchful about what she might do as a woman. Incest being a taboo by common consent—unless performed *sub rosa*, as is done not infrequently, only without love, young widows are possessed rather as beasts of burden than as women. Indeed, with the backward peasant masses, women generally are beasts of burden in the first place, performing the sexual function only incidentally. So, the woman of this story, like others in her position, must have had a certain amount of freedom regarding the satisfaction of sex-impulse.

Those of her kind are not handicapped by psychological inhibitions cultivated among the upper classes. Nor are restrictions on movement so very strictly observed that they could not be broken through on the sly. Young widows perform labour for the merest keep. Consideration for the value of their labour does not permit their keepers to be too exacting about their conduct when they are not gainfully employed. One does not turn out such a valuable asset simply because she

happens to meet a man in the barn. This particular woman was given that latitude, willy-nilly, if not quite consciously.

In course of time, she became pregnant. Even that fact, when it came to be known to her keepers, did not provoke moral indignation sufficiently strong to turn her out. For the good horse-sense of the peasant, unencumbered by moral cant, it would be silly to lose the labour power of a strong young woman on such an account as could be easily settled. She was ordered to keep under cover until the child was born, then get rid of it promptly by strangulation, and dispense with the remains neatly according to instruction. The alternative to obeying the order was expulsion from the only refuge in the hostile world, public disgrace, and a future too dreadful to visualise. If the helpless woman was actually asked to choose between the alternatives is not known. However, she had to choose. There was no other way of escape. The man she met in the barn, of course, would take no responsibility. Nor had she any claim on him. She chose to kill her child, failed to cover up the deed, was charged of an heinous offence, found guilty, and condemned. The whole tragic process was formally proper and legally justifiable, if not quite just. But perverse indeed is the sense of justice and morality which fails to sympathise with the unfortunate creature as a helpless victim of an immoral, unjust, cruel, stupid society.

It was so obviously a case of crime committed under compulsion by an utterly helpless and hopeless victim of social conditions, that even the legalistic bias of the judge was overwhelmed by pity.

In her statement during the trial, the woman declared that she had killed the child, not for the sake of herself, but to spare the child the pain of dying of starvation eventually. Had she not acted as she did reluctantly, she would be thrown out in a hostile world, with absolutely no means of subsistence except charity from the merciful, which could not be expected by a branded sinner. Despair overwhelmed maternal instinct. Or, was not the crime really suicide of maternal instinct at bay? At any rate, the punished "criminal" was certainly not responsible for the crime. The responsibility cannot be laid at the door of any single individual or of a few individuals. It was a collective responsibility, as the responsibility for practically all crimes is.

C

An incident reported in the press about the same time throws light on the fact (though few saw the light) that similar sort of crime is committed also by higher-class people, supposed to be morally more elevated, but who usually escape public detection and legal punishment thanks to their advantageous social position. A smashed-up carcass of a new-born babe, well wrapped-up in good

clothes, was found under a railway bridge over a big river. Evidently, it had been thrown out by some one from a running train the night before. Now, who could have done that? Certainly no passenger travelling in an ordinary third or inter-class carriage. He would be caught forthwith red-handed, because he would never be alone. To do the deed neatly, without the danger of detection, the perpetrator must travel second or perhaps first class; and since even then he could not be sure of being alone, very probably he travelled in a reserved compartment. In short, all the facts of the case went to prove clearly that people concerned with the incident were well-to-do.

There could be no question about the body being that of a murdered child. Circumstantial evidence all pointed to that conclusion. From the sort of clothes, in which the body was wrapped, it could be inferred that the child did not belong to the lower class of people. On the other hand, the kind of people, to which the dead child evidently belonged, would not leave the body in the condition it was found, had the child died naturally. In that case, it would be properly cremated. Besides, it was not necessary to depend only on circumstantial evidence. Direct evidence could be easily found in an autopsy of the body. Even a careful examination for extraordinary symptoms would do. Unwanted new-born babes are usually

disposed of by strangulation which leaves an unmistakable trace.

Evidently the child was illegitimate ; otherwise, it would not have been disposed of in that way. The legal crime of murder must have been preceded by the moral delinquency of "illicit" sexual intercourse, involving either a widow or an unmarried girl. Most probably, in this case, the murder was not committed by the mother. Therefore, there was no extenuating circumstance as in the case of the punished woman in the previous case. The crime was all the more heinous because it was wilful. There was no material compulsion. The motive was the lack of courage to stand up openly against stupid social conventions on the part of those who surreptitiously indulge in practices they themselves condemn as immoral when others are concerned. That is a sordid motive. Yet, the criminals escape detection, disgrace and legal punishment, because they were rich, possessed of the means to cover up their immoral conduct and criminal act. The police could have easily run down the person who had thrown the body out of the train, if they followed up the clue which was plentiful and clear. But there was some hidden force to arrest their zeal. When the rich are involved, the wheels of the administration of criminal law, so merciless otherwise, turn slowly, and leave the criminals alone if that could be possibly managed. The verdict of society also is as accom-

modating and condoning in the case of upper-class misdemeanants, as it is harsh and merciless when dealing with the helpless.

D

There was an old man, well above sixty, sentenced to death for killing his young wife. On appeal, the sentence was reduced to transportation for life. His advanced age was taken into consideration. I wonder how he liked the change. Since the shortest term that a lifer must serve is ten years, there was little chance of the man serving out his sentence. It is better to die at once than undergo the process over a period of a number of years. Yet, I have not met one single prisoner who would not prefer a life sentence to the capital. Curious !

A prisoner's life is mortgaged. He cannot dispense with it voluntarily. One should not be allowed to cheat the law. Justice is a vindictive Goddess ; and therefore she is so very unjust. Violation of the sacred right of property is the greatest of crimes. Criminal law is an instrument for the defence of possession. Penology is not corrective, but coercive. One is punished for having violated or threatened the right of property of others, directly or indirectly. Yet, the essence of his punishment is the deprivation of the very same right ! Is it not illogical and unjust ? There would be some justification if he was de-

prived only of those things that he had acquired from others. That would be mediaeval justice : but at least justifiable on the principle of might is right, which still remains the foundation of civilised law with all its legalistic hypocrisy. But to deprive one of the only birth-right—of that which is a gift of nature—that is really a crass contradiction of the fundamental principle of criminal justice. My life belongs to me. Only my parents can claim any right on it on the ground that it is their creation. But even they were merely instrumental in the creation of my life, which was an act of nature. So, according to the principle of criminal justice, which includes penology, one's right on one's own life is inalienable. He should have unlimited freedom as regards it. But a prisoner, whatever may be his formal sentence is deprived of this right. Logic as well as morality demand that each victim of criminal justice be given the option of killing himself instead of undergoing the punishment inflicted on him. The option could be easily given, because very few would exercise it. Fear of death contributes so very considerably to the slavery of man.

However, let me record the story of the old man who killed his wife. When he married, (I do not remember whether it was for the third or the fourth time), he was not yet sixty. So, his action was not altogether unjustifiable. But he made the mistake of overlooking the fact that

the justification would disappear by the time his bride would be a woman. She was hardly ten at the time of their marriage. When she was twenty, the man was well over sixty. He naturally liked having a young wife—to cook his food and otherwise look after him. But a healthy young woman of twenty wants something more out of marital relations. The cause of the eventually committed crime and its punishment originated in that divergence of the natural needs of two people united inseparably.

The old man could not be held responsible for marrying a girl of ten. He was a simple villager ; where could he get a grown-up bride in the village ? Presumably, he would have preferred a mature woman for the consideration of domestic management, if not for more intimate reason. However, he had to take what was available, like everybody, and wait. Only, meanwhile, he grew old, less capable of performing his marital duty to the satisfaction of the other party concerned, than of demanding his due which was rather of servile than marital nature.

The result was that the young wife began to carry on with some village beau. Conventionally, she deviated from the path of virtue,—sexual faithfulness to the husband. If the husband was, for some reason or other, in this particular case, for advanced age, not capable of retaining the faithfulness on the part of the wife, the latter

should remain faithful to the ideal of wifely chastity. Our social law-givers wanted to improve upon nature and rectify a mistake of the Maker. Sex-impulse is natural, and demands satisfaction. If it is a sinful desire, why did not God exclude it from the scheme of his creation? It is sheer sophistry to argue that he created human beings with the sinful desire in order to give them a chance to be virtuous. If God is good, everything he created must also be good. The moralists are the most immoral and the religious are the most irreligious people in the world. To try to improve on the scheme of God's creation is to insult God. Instead of abandoning their perverse, irreligious notions of morality and stupid social taboos, the orthodox persecute those who obey the will of God and act according to the providentially ordained laws of nature. The young wife of the old man could not obey the man-made law and natural law at the same time. She obeyed God instead of man. Hence she was sinful in the eyes of society which places human wisdom above divine dispensation, while pretending to be guided by this.

The young woman seems to have been particularly spirited, possessed of admirable courage and frankness, the appreciation and practice of which would improve the moral tone of our social life. The old man told that he did not intend to kill her. He wanted to persuade her

to give up her evil ways. But he was uncontrollably enraged by her insolent retort to his rebuke. The scandalising answer was that, being herself young, she wanted a young man ; and as she could not leave her old husband and marry again, she was compelled to go the way she was going. She further said that she was doing her duty to the husband—taking care of his household, looking after his physical welfare, etc. ; that it was he who was failing in his marital duty, and therefore it was absurd for him to accuse her of infidelity. He should not be a dog in the manger ; he should not object to her seeking elsewhere, in the only way possible under the given social conditions, what he could not give her.

That was an unheard of insult. It made the old man see red ; and he killed her. Even after conviction, with at least ten years of rigorous imprisonment staring him grimly in the face, the old man was boiling with moral indignation. But one could easily see that it was not so much his moral sense as the sense of property that was outraged. The woman belonged to him. She had no business to give herself to a loafer and have the cheek to justify her action in such a brazen manner. She should have at least pretended faithfulness, as the token of formal admission of the husband's right of ownership, and then carry on with the young man clandestinely, if she were so incorrigibly

perverse as to desire something more than keeping house and sharing a barren bed with an old man.

The moralists do not see that, to place a woman in such a position and keep her there under the threat of social persecution, amounts to denying her the right of motherhood,—a right given by nature to every woman. Can anything be more immoral and sinful than depriving a woman of the delight of motherhood? No moralist would brand motherhood and the desire to have children as sinful. Then, how could they reasonably maintain their stupid attitude towards sex relations? There is no other way to motherhood. Only prophets and *avatars* are immaculately conceived. If motherhood is divine, the way to it cannot be sinful. When a natural impulse is placed under stupid taboos, it is bound to seek satisfaction in tortuous channels. The notion of morality that runs counter to the laws of nature is immoral. It leads to corruption and crime.

E

A middle-aged woman was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment on the charge of complicity in a clandestine act involving two deaths. The charge was not murder. A grown-up son of hers was also convicted as an accomplice.

The family concerned belonged to the urban trading class,—fairly well-to-do. The dead body of a new-born child was found in a lane by the house

in which the family lived. Police enquiry led to the disclosure of the fact that, in the night preceding the discovery of the child's body, a young widowed daughter of the family had died of "fever". Finally, the story turned out to be that it was a case of abortion, the mother as well as the child having died in the process. Except the sick daughter, the mother was alone present in the house that night. So, she was arrested. The son was accused of complicity or connivance, on the strength of the fact that the day before the death of his sister he had called in a doctor to treat her for fever. The doctor had found the girl lying all covered up in a feverish condition. He also was suspected of connivance, indeed of assisting at the abortion, if not directly on the spot, at least through the administration of some suitable drug ; but the case could not be brought home to him.

Whoever might have been involved in the tragedy, and whatever might have been the relative gravity of the parts played by them respectively, the salient facts of the case are these : A young widow belonging to a respectable family, despite the purdah in which she lived, had clandestine sex intercourse, if not a love affair. The result was pregnancy. She kept her state a secret as long as possible. Eventually, the mother came to know about the misfortune that had overtaken the family thanks to automatically observed social customs. What was to be done about it ? The good name

of the family had to be saved. The purpose would not be served by turning out the misbehaving daughter. Besides, the "misbehaviour" might have all along been a skeleton in the family cupboard. In cities, the movements of purdah women are strictly restricted. Any misbehaviour, therefore, must take place under the very nose of the defenders of forced chastity and obligatory faithfulness. Therefore, public disclosure always affects the name of the family concerned, which is suspected of moral laxity, at least to the extent of conniving with, if not actually encouraging, the misbehaviour on the part of individual members. Thus, the mother of the erring daughter was in a delicate position, and naturally sought the only way out, namely, abortion—an act neither legally permissible, nor morally tolerated.

Moral objection to abortion, practised under compulsion, that is, by women who would be socially persecuted if they owned up their motherhood, is a curious attitude. In the opinion of the moralist, as well as in the eyes of the law, abortion amounts to homicide, if not actual murder. The former says that any act committed to hide a sin, is itself sinful. Now, if conception out of wedlock is sinful, then, a child so conceived should be regarded as an embodiment of sin—a living monument to sinfulness. It should not be allowed to soil the moral atmosphere of society. Therefore, to kill such a child at

birth or to prevent it from being born, should be encouraged by the custodians of social morality.

The legal attitude towards abortion is utterly incomprehensible. Until the child is born, it has no existence, socially. So, the question of murder or homicide does not arise at all. An act concerning something which is not a part of society, cannot be interpreted as an offence against society ; therefore, it does not come under the purview of laws which are meant to punish offenders against society. Moreover, until it is delivered, the child is a part of the mother's body—her property in the physical as well as in the productive sense. Ownership carries with it the right of disposition. Law does not punish a woman for burning to ashes a pearl necklace legitimately belonging to her. But it puts her in prison if she chooses to destroy an embryo in her womb which is her private possession more intimately than the necklace. Is it not senseless ? It is as ridiculous as to punish one for inflicting a wound on his body. Before the child acquires the double position—child of its parents and an incipient social unit—it entirely belongs to the mother. Therefore, by punishing abortion, criminal law contradicts its own fundamental principle. It penalises the exercise of the right of ownership precisely in such a case wherein this is acquired naturally, and therefore inalienable. Before the child is born, it does not exist socially ; so, society has no call to take it under protection.

How do you know it wants to be protected ? Besides, when it really needs protection, society seldom comes to its aid. Who punishes society for letting countless children die of malnutrition, lack of medical aid, bad hygienic conditions and other preventable causes ? Society officiously takes embryonic lives under its protection, so that it can kill them wholesale when they have become human beings. Governments commit murder *en masse*, in various ways. War is the most glaring example. Is it not sheer impudence for such Governments to send individuals to the gallows for a "crime" which pales into utter insignificance when compared with the crimes committed by themselves ?

If abortion is a crime, the social system that compels its commission is responsible for it. No mother would ever destroy her child, unless she is absolutely compelled to do so. The compulsion results from the convention which makes motherhood dependent on wedlock. Motherhood is a gift of nature. Marriage is a man-made institution. The consummation of a natural impulse is branded as immoral, if it does not take place within the limits of a man made institution which does not make room for all. Under no condition, motherhood can be immoral. On what moral ground can a widow be deprived of the natural right to motherhood ? Nor is there any reason to brand the unmarried mother with the stigma

of sinfulness. Naturally and morally, no child is illegitimate. Recognise this simple truth, and the tragic practice of abortion will disappear. A mother reluctantly destroys her child, only when she has to be ashamed of her motherhood instead of being proud of it. The anxiety to avoid the shame of illegitimate motherhood, leads to the commission of the crime of abortion which, committed necessarily clandestinely, with crude, often dangerous means, under insanitary conditions, involves the life of the mother as well. Sometimes the mother is killed in order that the new life germinated in her "sin" may be destroyed. Obviously, that was what happened in the case here recorded.

The harassed old woman certainly did not want to kill her daughter, however much she might have disapproved of her misdemeanour. But steps taken for sparing the family shame and social persecution, led to the death of the unfortunate girl. The mortification of the poor old lady could be easily imagined. As if she was not sufficiently punished by the tragic consequence of her own act, done in deference to a callous society and unthinking compliance with a perverse code of morality! In addition to that, she had to pay the penalty of law. Helpless victim of cruelty and injustice, she blamed her fate, and sought consolation in her faith in the doctrine of *karma*.

F

There was the case of an entire family punished on the charge of murdering one man. Altogether six, including two women. The father with one of his three sons was hanged. The remaining two brothers, the mother and a daughter-in-law—all given transportation for life.

The murdered man was the village money-lender. The family punished for murdering him lived on a few bighas of land, and was heavily indebted as all poor Indian peasant families are. The meagre means of subsistence of a number of hard-working people was at the legal disposal of the money-lender who held a mortgage on it.

The charge was that one day the money-lender was invited to the house of the debtors who proposed to do business over a friendly meal. It was alleged that the plan was to poison him ; but somehow he survived the murderous plan which, granted that the allegation was true, by its very nature, must have the criminal co-operation of the women-folk of the household. The would-be murderers, however, were determined to dispatch the benevolent bania out of the arduous life of collecting compound interest from a lot of people destitute of the means for meeting their legal obligations in full and promptly on demand. It was argued from the side of the prosecution that the shrewd bania had smelled rats, and left the friendly feast rather precipitately ; the father of

the family with one son accompanied him, and hacked the good samaritan in a wood on the way. The argument was that the behaviour of the guest had frightened the criminal conspirators who realised that, to head off sure exposure of their murderous plan, they must finish the job somehow ; and they did with a *dao* what could not be done neatly with poison.

The defence was that the distressed debtors had hoped to mollify the money-lender with hospitality, and then persuade him not to drive them off the land as he had threatened to do if they failed to pay off in full. But with all the Indian's spiritual view of life, the bania had behaved like the materialist American, and insisted upon doing business first. He was alleged to have made scornful remarks about the proffered hospitality—that instead of wasting money in feasts, honest and god-fearing people should meet their legal obligations ; that good people would rather starve than deny their legitimate dues. The hosts had resented the attitude of the guest, and there had resulted an altercation. Upon that, the bania had left in a rage, saying that the invitation was a plan to poison him, and that he was going to report it to the police.

Terrified by the ominous threat, the father followed by one son, had gone with the indignant man with the object of pacifying him, so that he would not carry out his threat. Instead of being

pacified, the enraged bania had grown more insulting, and used abusive language with reference to the women. Since one of these was the young man's wife, he had lost his temper and assaulted the vilifier who was severely wounded in consequence. Afraid that, if they left him in that condition, he would surely do the greatest possible harm, the father had aided the hasty son with the hope of finding safety in the belief that a dead man tells no tales. So, as far as those two were concerned, the murder was confessed, and law sent them to the gallows with a clear conscience. The rest was sentenced, and given the maximum punishment, on circumstantial evidence.

Granted that the prosecution case was properly proved (it must have been, technically, otherwise a competent Court would not pronounce the judgment), and that the defence story was unreliable, what about the facts that, though not mentioned in defence, constituted the setting in which the crime was committed? Itself an instrument for maintaining the social *status quo*, criminal justice, nevertheless, does not admit in evidence facts that are contributory to, often compel the commission of, crimes it punishes. Social causes of crime are dismissed as irrelevant to the administration of criminal justice which is an act of social coercion.

However, extenuating circumstances are taken into consideration even when the technical respon-

sibility for the crime is proved. Was there no extenuating circumstance in this case? At least as far as the four not directly involved in the murder were concerned, particularly the women?

But the point is not this or that particular case, or punishment of individuals. It is that here we have a type of "crime", the responsibility for which clearly belongs to the socio-political system that punishes it. The law is not a purely political instrument, that is to say, governmental affair, as it is generally believed to be. It has a social sanction. The Indian society cannot shirk the responsibility for the legal punishment of this type of crime with the convenient plea that it had no hand in the making of the law. Didn't it? That is the question. Whence comes the shameless opposition to legislative measures meant not to harm the money-lender, but only to give some very inadequate protection to his helpless victims? Even to-day, many Indian public men vehemently disapprove of projects for a radical cure of the cause of mass indebtedness which places people in such a hopeless position that they are compelled to commit crimes for the sake of remaining in human existence, supposed to be a gift of God. They want to help the peasantry, but would not do injustice to other classes. The peasants are to be helped out of their ruinous indebtedness, but the "legitimate" right of their usurious creditors should also be respected. The nationalists are the

spokesmen of the Indian society. They are opposed to the present Government; but they approve of the principle of law in Courts. The principle is coercion for the maintenance of the social *status quo*.

Opponents of any radical measure maintain that the rural masses themselves are largely responsible for their indebtedness. The most oft repeated argument is that they get into deep waters owing to the habit of spending beyond their means in ceremonials such as marriage etc. In the first place, though the charge is not altogether groundless, it ignores the fundamental fact of the economic condition of the toiling masses either deliberately or through naive disregard for realities. The fact is that such a large portion of the peasants' net income is taken away from them, in one form or another, as does not leave them, in the great majority of cases, nearly sufficient for bare existence. Practically the entire bulk of the peasantry is always short of working capital, and is obliged to borrow it. This fundamental fact of the situation not only exposes the bankruptcy of the peasant masses, but vitiates the whole system of national economy. It is so very evident that to-day none dare deny it. There are, of course, all sorts of explanations; but the fact remains, not to be explained away. The disease eats into the vitals of the entire social structure, and cannot be cured by quackery, whether preached

by prophets who would make omelette without breaking even one single egg, or practised by a niggardly Government whose hands are tied by its own nature. The latter's efforts are bound to be as ludicrously ineffective as the effort of pulling oneself up by his own boot-strings. Meanwhile, crimes of all kind must spread as ugly symptoms of a chronic disease. The legal punishment of these crimes is morally as justifiable as penalising the victims of a contagious disease.

In the second place, granted the contention that the indebtedness of the masses is to some extent due to the expenditure on ceremonials, the seekers after the root-cause of the disease must ask : Whose fault is that ? If those, often without the means of bare subsistence, are found as a rule to incur occasional expenditures which aggravate their plight, already hopeless, they must be acting under compulsion. Expenditure for ceremonial purposes are socially compelled. They are seldom made voluntarily. Therefore, the responsibility on that account cannot be laid at the door of the people who practise them. It belongs to religious legislation, social custom, and cultural tradition.

Religion teaches that it is the duty of children to perform certain ceremonies on the death of their parents, the default in which would not only cause inconvenience to the dead, but prejudice the post-mortem position of the defaulters themselves. These ceremonies, prescribed as religious practices,

cannot however be performed in a simple religious manner—through prayer or worship, for example. They are rituals, and as such require more than a spiritual attitude. They are essentially means for paying material tribute to the administrators of the religious law.

The superstition that the deliverance of the soul of the dead is conditional upon the due performance of certain prescribed rituals having been traditionally ingrained into the popular mind, the expenses necessary for the purpose are matters of obligation, though met voluntarily by the superstitious. To hold them responsible for this ruinous habit, is no more reasonable than to rebuke a drug-addict after having forced him to cultivate the pernicious practice. Like Government, religion also takes tribute ; and the greater the ignorance of the faithful, the more the tribute exacted for the protection of their souls. For the Indian masses, the laws of Manu or of the Shariat or any other religious law, not only religiously administered, but often fraudulently interpreted by the custodians of the spiritual law and order, is more binding than the temporal laws of the political regime. These they obey out of fear ; whereas religious laws, though no less, indeed more, ruinous economically and coercive socially, are obeyed by habit which, born of ignorance, has been skillfully cultivated through ages by the beneficiaries thereof, and is deeply entrenched in superstition

fostered fanatically by the ideologists of the forces of reaction which thrive parasitically on the material misery and moral degradation of the masses.

Economic bankruptcy of the masses, progressive pauperisation of the poorer strata, is a fertile breeding ground for crimes, the responsibility for which, therefore, belongs to the socio-political system which cannot exist without creating those deplorable conditions. Crimes are symptoms of social malady. The only effective and moral manner of combating them is to get into grips with the disease, the nature of which is indicated by them. As long as there will be people driven to despair by indebtedness, inevitable because incurred under pressure of forces beyond their control, crime of the nature described above cannot be checked by any number of exemplary punishments as inflicted in this case.

G

Finally, there is the case of a man hanged for massacring his whole family. He was regarded as a maniac. Yet, instead of being placed in a mental hospital, the poor fellow was sent to the gallows, in strict accordance with the dictates of merciless justice. God is just and merciful ; but justice, which is supposed to be an attribute of God, is merciless. Queer logic !

The crime committed by the man could be described as atrocious ; nor did he deny the charge.

He could not, having done his murderous deed quite openly. That is why he was described as a maniac. But his explanation of the extraordinary behaviour was highly interesting.

For some time, his wife had been regarded as a witch by the inhabitants of the village. In the beginning, he had not paid much attention to the story whispered about. But gradually, it became a matter of general belief, and he was approached by the village elders with the demand that he should drive away the mother of his children, whose presence was believed to be harmful to the village. The charge was that she could bring about the death of anybody by simply wishing it, and that a number of untimely deaths had recently occurred on that account. It is surprising that the man, himself an ignorant rustic, did not readily fall victim to the popular superstition, and do as demanded of him. It would be quite natural for him to behave so. But, to the utter chagrin of the village *vox dei*, he behaved otherwise. He refused to act on the noble model of Ramachandra; he would not sacrifice his wife, the mother of his children, to placate vulgar superstition.

For his kind, that was an incomprehensible attitude. There was no ground to assume that the villagers were moved by malice, although it could not be altogether excluded that the charge against the woman had been the result of some private animosity. However, once the rumour was afloat,

the villagers generally came to believe sincerely that the woman was a witch. Sincerity, that is to say, honesty of faith, is the most fundamental characteristic of superstition. That is why superstition dies so very hard. They being honest about their belief in the evilness of the woman, it was incomprehensible for them how someone could fail to share it. The relation between the non-conformist and the persecuted woman was a matter of no consequence. What is a wife ? One does not place the loyalty to a mere woman above popular suspicion, based on traditional faith. Even Ramachandra did not do so. He exiled Sita to placate public opinion. The unprecedented behaviour of the man aroused suspicion against himself. He was believed to be an accomplice of his wife. He could not possibly stand by the evil woman unless he was himself evil. Before long, there were stories about co-operation between the man and his wife in various nefarious acts. They were shunned by all the villagers who were afraid of them. The entire family came to be regarded as a brood of evil.

It was not a very pleasant position to be in. What could the poor fellow do ? The whole village was scared out of wits ; and the neighbourhood shared the superstition. Fear deadens reason, the very little of it possessed by the superstitious. He could not persuade the people to see that they were scared of a spectre invoked out of their

credulity. Nor was he free from superstition himself. He would have been with the crowd, had the object of persecution been someone else. He did not have anything like a rational conviction to fall back upon as the unshakable line of defence against the onslaught of popular prejudice. He was thoroughly bewildered by the turn of events. It was too late to throw the accursed woman overboard which he would have done to extricate himself and his family from the intolerable situation. The only possible way out would be to leave the village, and go away beyond the reach of the gratuitous notoriety. But even that did not hold out any convincing promise. For, he was no longer sure that his wife was not what she was suspected to be. Superstition would not permit him to see that, as he was believed to be a wizard, though he was not, so might also be the case with his wife. If his wife was really a witch, and he had come to share the general fear, what was the use of going away?

To take her alone would be to remain wedded to the misfortune. So long as the loadstone hung around his accursed neck, he was sure to sink, no matter where he went. On the other hand, the idea of leaving her behind was not appealing. He was not sure that she could be so easily got rid of. Fate had placed him in a position which had no way out. There was a more potent consideration which precluded the possi-

bility of escape. Where could he go? How should he maintain his family in a new place? All his earthly possessions consisted of a bit of land. That he must leave behind. So, should he leave the native village, with or without the impediment of the witch of a wife, the only destination would be eventual death from starvation. That was not a very alluring escape. It is in human nature to cling to the physical being, however unbearable, until it becomes psychologically impossible. Suicide is always committed in a state of temporary insanity. Despair creates the pathological condition.

The man was actually driven mad by the helplessness of his position. The crime for which he was punished, gruesome as it was, was an act of madness. The man was killed with the ceremonious sanction of law, not for any fault of his own, but because popular ignorance, fostered by our spiritual culture, drove him mad. In any case, how is society benefitted by law adding murders to those committed without the sanction of law? How is it justifiable for law to commit the crime it presumes to punish? Justice is still far from being civilised. She remains a savage Goddess who demands human sacrifice. And gods and goddesses are made after the image of their worshippers. If the world was really civilised, it would not worship a savage goddess with the offering of

blood. You may place the offering in an electric chair ; yet, it is human sacrifice.

H

At the last moment, a very singular case came to my notice. Being of a different type, I must record it.

In this case also, the crime is murder, committed by a young man who was sentenced for the offence to transportation for life. The victim was a religious mendicant. The judge had no doubt about the guilt of the accused ; but he generously thought that it was a case in which justice might be tempered with mercy, because the crime was committed under grave provocation. The nature of the provocation makes the case interesting.

The culprit belongs to the class of wage-earners. Having failed to find any employment in his home town, he went to distant parts in quest of it. But in these days of wide-spread unemployment, one place is as bad as another. Consequently, the young man (he was rather a boy, being still in his 'teens) wandered from place to place, becoming, like others without number, a sort of vagrant. In course of his peregrinations in search of employment, not to be found anywhere, he happened to pick up acquaintance with the mendicant.

It is a peculiarity of Indian society that, while those willing to perform productive labour for their daily bread starve in hundreds of thousands,

religious mendicancy is a profession which supports myriads of parasites. The vagrant boy told his story to the holy man, and was asked to be his *chela*, in which capacity his daily bread would be provided for. Being hopeless to find any employment, the boy accepted the generous offer, and became an apprentice in the only profession which still always pays in India. But there was a condition in the contract which, though not stipulated by the holy man in the beginning, was imposed on the other party subsequently. The boy seems to have submitted for a time reluctantly to the condition which he found to be odious. Finally, he rebelled, and killed the holy man for exacting a repellant price for measly morsels of begged bread.

The boy pleaded not guilty to the charge. The body of the murdered man was found in a lonely place, and several villagers testified that they had caught the boy running away in blood-stained clothes. The story of the accused was that he had gone away for a while leaving the holy man asleep in the lonely place. On his return, he found him lying frightfully wounded and rushed to his aid. Thereupon, some men appeared on the scene and caught hold of him.

The interesting piece of evidence, which indicated the motive of the crime, was that apart from other wounds inflicted with a stout branch the sex organ of the murdered man was smashed up.

It was clear that this was not caused by any of the blows that killed the man ; nor would any chance murderer select such a part for dealing blows with the purpose of killing the victim. Evidently, the tell-tale blow was delivered after the man had been killed or overwhelmed, for ventilating the repugnance to certain behaviour of the holy man which had supplied the motive of the murderer's act. The judge himself seized upon that interesting piece of evidence which, in his legalistic opinion, established the guilt of the accused, in spite of the circumstantial nature of the entire evidence against him, and, at the same time, showed that he had acted under grave provocation, thus entitling him to leniency of punishment.

There is no doubt that the boy killed the holy man ; and it is also clear why the murder was committed. The question is : *morally*, who was the criminal ? If one must pay the penalty for a crime committed, did not the murdered man only get his desert ? The punishment was excessive ? Well, that, deliberately, on sober consideration, inflicted on the boy, was no less so. The boy was admittedly driven to the crime. It might be argued that the boy could have left the holy man if he did not like complying with his demand. But that would simply be condoning the hateful behaviour of the holy man. As if he was morally justified in making the demand, because he gave the boy his daily bread. Besides, utter destitution

had forced the boy to the easy profession of mendicancy. Naturally, he would be reluctant to forfeit the privilege of parasitism derived from the association with the holy man. It was morally perverse on the part of this latter to exact such a price for the privilege. It would be a different matter, had the boy voluntarily accepted the condition from the beginning. Evidently, he did not. Afraid of the dire prospect of returning to the hunt for employment, never to be found, the boy submitted to what he loathed. While reluctantly complying with the repugnant condition in payment for the privilege of eating the bread begged by the mendicant, the boy came to hate the man. The murder was the fierce expression of his hatred which the latter fully deserved.

This case reveals the practice of moral perversity that is usually hidden behind the much vaunted virtue of celibacy. The profession of sexual continence leads to abnormal practices. Nature cannot be cheated. The vain notion that the religious can rise above the law of nature only breeds self-deception and hypocrisy. The few who really practise as well as profess continence, become psychologically deranged, given to morbid fantasies, and hallucinations (trance, etc.) glorified as tokens of spiritual elevation. These expressions of spirituality are distorted emotional states brought about by suppressed desires. Nature takes vengeance.

However, by and large, celibacy is a sham

which gives rise to all sorts of licentious and perverse practices, in their turn often leading to the commission of crimes. Would not the holy man be less despicable morally if he had visited the house of a prostitute in order to satisfy his natural desire, instead of doing so in the abominable manner he adopted ? Even homosexuality, as such, need not be regarded as moral degradation. Preferred to normal intercourse, it is rather an emotional morbidity to be treated psychiatrically. But with those like our holy man, it is not a matter of preference, but practised because it is cheaper and can be done clandestinely with greater facility. Thus, it must be regarded as sheer moral perversity, and those given to it condemned as corrupt criminals, masquerading in a religious guise. Rational beings could hardly adhere to, and proudly defend, a religion that encourages such corrupt and corrupting practices under the veil of venerable professions.

Not only in India, but everywhere, crimes are symptoms of social disease. They have been that throughout the ages, all over the world. And instead of treating them as such, attempts have been made to suppress them more or less cruelly with the sanction of religion, ethics, social codes and law. The attempts have failed as they must. So long as society remains based upon ignorance, superstition, brutalisation, suppression, poverty and degradation of the masses, so that privileges of

caste, sex, class (as the case may be) can be preserved, crime cannot be successfully combated, however severe may be the punitive measures, or well organised the administration of justice. The more decadent a society, the uglier and more widespread are the crimes. Forms of crimes are determined by the social conditions under which they are committed. While the majority of criminal acts are economically motivated, in India as well as in any other country, socially organised as described above, the peculiar cultural atmosphere of this country breeds specific types of crime. There is still another peculiarity, which springs from the same source.

In every country, legal punishment of crime is sanctioned by the established religion and orthodox codes of morality. But as a rule, the criminal, while bowing down before legal justice, enforced by the power of the State, is more or less rebellious as regards the religion and morality which endorse his punishment. In India, the criminal's psychology co-operates with his punishment. Even if he feels that law has done him injustice as he often does, victimisation of the legally innocent being not infrequent, he himself supplies the moral justification of the injustice done to him. It is all written in his fate,—result of his *karma*. Instead of revolting against the injustice, he finds in it divine dispensation.

Fatalism, which sums up the much advertised

spiritual nature of the Indian people, teaches him to hold himself responsible not only for the social conditions that have driven him to crime, but even for the legal injustice palpably done to him.

I know many a man serving long terms of imprisonment for crimes they did not commit. Yet, they are totally devoid of any moral indignation or even resentment. If the facts of social iniquity and legal injustice are pointed out to them, with a religious fervour, they touch their forehead. It is all unalterably predetermined ; no use complaining against it. Indeed, it is sinful to do so. They are reconciled to the hard lot, accepting it as divine dispensation. Such supine resignation to injustice is not a token of spirituality. It is moral degeneration ; and this shameful psychological state of the Indian masses is our cultural heritage. Is it anything to be proud about ?

Here we find religion standing naked as an instrument not only of traditional and time-honoured social oppression, but even of crass legal injustice. Religiosity has broken the backbone of the Indian people. It has crushed the spirit of revolt, which is the lever of human progress. Resignation, the characteristic feature of the Indian people, leads to stagnation which is living death. Thousands of victims of social iniquity, and high-handedness of the minions of law and order, finding solace in the religious superstition of fate or *karma*—that is the depressing sight to be seen in

Indian prisons. And the jail population being a cross-section of society outside, the sight presented by it transcends the prison walls, and provides food for serious thought to those who have the courage to distinguish facts from fictions, to look into the frowning face of rude reality.

A study of the psychology of the Indian criminals throws a flood of light on the doctrine of *karma* ; it enables one to appreciate how spiritually corrupting and morally degrading the religious view of life is. Religion is based on ignorance. The future of India is seriously prejudiced by her cultural traditions which keep the masses in ignorance, so that superstition can remain alive as the foundation of the religious view of life. In so far as the masses are concerned, our religious or spiritual culture stands for ignorance, superstition and fatalism. There is no future for a nation, the vast bulk of which remain in such a deplorable state of spiritual and moral backwardness. How can it be free when its cultural tradition teaches people to make a virtue of submission ? And the most curious thing is that even some of the prophets of national freedom are fanatical, though not always sincere, protagonists of that very tradition which precludes the will to freedom. Thanks to this curiosity, the movement for national freedom has been caught up in a vicious circle. Revolt and submission are mutually exclusive. The first condition for national freedom is to break away from

FRAGMENTS OF A PRISONER'S DIARY

the paralysing grip of the hands of the dead past. Loyalty to the dead often amounts to betrayal of the living. The captive of the past can never conquer the future.

CHAPTER V

THE CULT OF ASCETICISM AND RENUNCIATION

A SOCIAL DISEASE

The National Renaissance of any people has for one of its conditions a critical view not only of the given epoch, but of its entire history. For the present is but a product of the past. A thorough change of the conditions of any given period requires, first of all, the discovery of the causes of those conditions which are usually rooted even in the remotest past of its history. An unbroken causal chain connects historical events which superficially might appear not only disconnected, but positively chaotic. The present conditions of India, for example, are considered to be the result of foreign rule. To stop there is to tell only half the truth. What was the cause of the foreign conquest? That could not be an historical phenomenon without cause. The cause of that event must be sought in the past history of the Indian people. Some social disease must have enervated it so as to become an easy prey of foreign invaders. In short, only a critical examination of the past enables a people to discover the root cause of its present conditions, and the change of these latter depends upon the eradication of the former.

So long as a people seeks consolation for its present misery in the real or imaginary glory of the past, the doors of the future remain closed before it. Glorification of the past is a prominent characteristic of Indian Nationalism. Critical study of our own history is foreign to its ideology. Drunk with the cheap satisfaction that Indian culture, being "spiritual", is superior to that of other people, we do not think that there is anything for us to learn from the history of foreign countries. Otherwise, it would be evident that "the special features" of Indian culture also marked the history of other peoples. In the critical history of other peoples we might find a picture of our own past and be impelled to discover in our own history similar causes that produced analogous phenomena in other countries. It is generally believed that renunciation of the world in quest of a spiritual life is the badge of superiority of Indian culture. When the same practice is found to have been rampant also in other countries, India must give up her claim to distinction at least on that score. The favourite theory of our past thus shaken, there must begin a critical study of history as the necessary condition for the conquest of the future.

"The (early Christian) ascetics were inspired by the savage enthusiasm which represents man as a criminal and God as a tyrant..." (Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*). The

ascetic Christians as distinguished from the "vulgar" renounced all the pleasures of life and duties of society. They lived on coarse and scanty food, begged or voluntarily offered. Their food excluded meat, and drink excluded wine. They practised celibacy. No marriage was allowed. Body and mind were mortified by all sorts of cruel device. Natural inclinations of body as well as of mind (love, affection, cheerfulness, rest, recreation etc.) were condemned as vices. Monasticism was rampant. Thousands and thousands of "ascetics fled from a profane and degenerate world to perpetual solitude or religious society. They resigned the use of the property of their temporal possessions..... They soon acquired the respect of the world which they despised ; and loudest applause was bestowed on their divine philosophy which suppressed, without the aid of science or reason, the laborious virtues of the Grecian schools". (Ibid.)

A critical historian should have the courage to depict a similar picture of the ancient and mediæval India. Not only that is not done, but similar practices are still extolled as highly commendable with sublime indifference to science and reason.

Not only did Christianity preach asceticism and renunciation of the world as virtues. Previously, the Pythagoreans had practised silence and submission as the gates of wisdom. With the

Stoics also the contempt of fortune, pain and death was the badge of a philosopher ; and the Cynics had demonstrated their disdain for the amenities of life and the established customs of society.

As the Pro-Consul of the Asiatic provinces of the Roman Republic, the philosophic Pliny was amused and astonished to find (in the early years of the Christian era) "solitary people who subsisted without money, who propagated without women (that is, whose number increased by the influx of new proselytes), and who derived from the disgust of mankind a perpetual supply of voluntary associates". (Natural History)

Asceticism had been practised by the Jewish Prophets during many hundred years before the rise of Christianity. John the Baptist was the last of a long succession of Prophets who shunned the world and thundered anathema against its vices, allurements, futility and transitoriness. The rise of Christianity was immediately preceded by the appearance of a numerous Jewish sect (the Essenians) who adopted the creed of asceticism. Then there were the Gnostics, and the mystic votaries of Alexandrian Neo Platonism. All were so many symptoms of a social crisis which appeared to be insurmountable. Christian monasticism was the acute state of that social disease. The Christian monks only went farther than their pagan ancestors. "The votaries of divine philosophy aspired to imitate a purer and more perfect model.

They trod in the footsteps of the prophets who had retired to the deserts; and they resorted to the devout and contemplative life which had been instituted by the Essenians in Palestine and Egypt." (Gibbon, *Ibid.*)

The beginning of Christian monasticism can be traced to Egypt, aptly characterised by Gibbon as "the fruitful parent of superstition". An illiterate youth named Anthony was the pioneer of the cult. He gave up his patrimony, deserted his family and retired to the desert where he devoted himself to a life of meditation and prayer accompanied by self-mortification with fanatical rigour. The destitute Egyptian peasant soon became famous as the torch bearer of divine light. His example was followed by thousands. In the beginning, the Christian Church looked askance at the monastic movement. But the genius of Athanasius—the redoubtable father of Catholic orthodoxy—had the courage to face the fact. Anthony became a Saint and the powerful Bishop understood that the Church must reconcile herself with, and patronise, a movement which was striking its roots deep into the spiritual imagination of the destitute masses. Later on, under the protection and patronage of the powerful Catholic Church, monasteries stood out as flourishing islands in the desolate sea of the social ruin that followed the fall of the Roman Empire. Religious discipline, superstition of holy severity—was the impetus to

the voluntary labour of the monks which replaced the disrupted old means of production, namely slavery.

The prolific colonies of monks multiplied in the deserts of Lybia, on the rocks of the Thebes, and in the cities throughout the valley of the Nile. The mountains and deserts in the very neighbourhood of the Egyptian capital were crowded with monks. No less than fifty monasteries were established by Anthony and his disciples. The ruins of those monuments of monasticism are still present for the observation of curious travellers. The monastic order of Anthony was composed of isolated individuals given to a life of penance, prayer and meditation, in the solitude of the desert and mountains.

Pachonius established "organised communities" of recluses. "Brothers" thus living together were subjected to a severe and rigid system of rules of conduct. Thus rose the monasteries which played such an important economic role to rescue society from the ruins of the Roman Empire. The first monastery of the Pachonian Order, founded on a small desolate island in the upper Nile, was peopled by fourteen hundred brethren. In quick succession the holy abbot established nine such communities for men and one also for women. Very soon the number embraced no less than fifty thousand members, pledged to strict celibacy, rigorous asceticism, severe mortification of body and mind, and complete indifference to the enjoyments

of worldly life. That numerous order of devout fanatics was held together by "the Angelic rules of discipline" framed by the founder.

The populous and once prosperous cities of the lower Nile were often crowded with thousands of males and females belonging to the monastic profession. Since the temples could not accomodate the credulous crowd of devotees, public edifices and even the city walls were used as pulpits and places of worship. According to the historian Rufinus, once upon a time half the entire population of Egypt had taken to the holy life of asceticism either as recluses in the solitude, or under the "Angelic discipline" of monasticism. Gibbon writes that in those days "in Egypt it was less difficult to find a God than a man".

The knowledge and the practice of the holy life of asceticism were introduced into Rome by Athanasius. The disciples of Anthony founded a settlement in the "capital of the world". Gibbon writes: "The strange and savage appearance of these Egyptians excited, at first, horror and contempt, and, at length, applause and jealous imitation. The Senators, and more specially the matrons, transformed their palaces and villas into religious houses." The apparent homage to the new institution of piety and devotion was rather an interest for a novelty which amused the jaded life of idleness and luxury, than a sign of spiritual fervour. Fear also played its role to enshrine the new super-

stitution in the place of the old pagan prejudice. Encouragement to the holy institution was expected to be recompensated in after-life. Having had drunk of the worldly to the bitter dregs, the degenerate Roman aristocracy liked the sensation of the novel practice which would guarantee them a more splendidous life in the Kingdom of Heaven. The sensuousness of paganism had been under Christian censure. The institution of vestal virgins dedicated to the gods was narrow, because the number of the holy objects of sensuousness was limited. The progeny of Numa had established a monopoly of the privilege. The new institution, indeed, flourished under the frowning sign of asceticism, but did not place any limit upon the number of the consecrated virgins. These holy sisters could not always refuse their graces, not of course from themselves but as the merited gift of God, to the devout Senators who had made such magnificent sacrifice to promote and patronise the angelic institution of monasticism. Portly matrons tasted a novel ecstasy by playing devout Magdalens to the imitations of the Saviour who came to bless them in the tempting persons of sturdy peasant youths from Egypt or Syria. Some fair scions of the degenerate aristocracy sought the morbid pleasure of mortifying their flesh having been sorely disappointed by the limitedness of earthly enjoyment. Since there was nothing more to taste of life, they sacrificed but

little. In such a state, an illusion is worth immensely more than the enervating feeling of over-satiation. Then, should the mortified flesh perchance be refractory and prove too restless for spiritual calm, there were holy brothers at hand to soothe the distressed with a mystical love which would drown the devil of lure in a surging sea of blissful ecstasy.

While the followers of the Egyptian Anthony and Pachonius were conquering pagan Rome, the Syrian desert was populated by the disciples of Hilarion. The Syrian youth passed twelve years of penance, prayer and ascetic life before he became the founder of numerous monasteries in his native land as well as in Palestine. In his travels, the holy man was accompanied by two or three thousand of his most ardent and devoted disciples. Later on, Simeon outshined his predecessor. At the tender age of thirteen, this shepherd youth renounced the world. His ascetic practices are reported to have defied the heat of thirty summers and the cold of as many winters at the top of a column of stone sixty feet high. In addition to the rigour of climate, the holy man, of course, resisted the mighty supernatural forces of evil which came to distract him from the celestial path. He never descended from his lofty position, but went to heaven straight with the glorious crown of voluntary martyrdom. The world that had once marvelled at the sublime speculation of a Plato and was enlightened by the scientific learn-

ing of an Aristotle, grovelled at the feet of an illiterate fanatic.

The name and fame of Basil are immortal in monastic history. Educated in the schools of Athens, he gave up the Archbishopric of Caesaria and retired into the mountainous fastness of Asia Minor. Later on he founded a chain of monasteries along the coast of the Black Sea.

Nor was monasticism confined to the Eastern Provinces of the tottering Roman Empire. In the fourth century of the Christian era, the enthusiasm to renounce the world, and practise asceticism, were rampant in Gaul as well as in the distant island of Britain. Saint Martin of Tours was a soldier who became a Bishop, and was canonised for his life of divine purity. Ecclesiastical historians of his time, particularly his biographers, maintain that the desert of the East did not produce any champion of virtue, renunciation and devotion greater than that of this Gaelic Saint. It is reported that two thousand devoted disciples followed the Master to the grave.

More than two thousand devoted ascetics inhabited the famous monastery of Banchor in Flintshire. The monastic movement reached even the obscure corner of Ireland, and the holy home of Saint Colomba was built in a small island of the Hebrides. In the fifth century of the Christian era, monks and nuns scattered over the ruins of the Roman Empire—from Britain to Ethiopia

and Spain to the confines of Persia—were counted in millions.

There voluntary exiles from social life were impelled by the dark and inexplicable forces of superstition. The rapid disintegration of antique society based upon slave labour, and the measures (unbearable taxation etc.) adopted to arrest the decline of the Roman Empire, had made worldly life utterly devoid of any hope for the masses. Every deluded soul was persuaded that on entering the monastic life, he or she travelled the road to eternal happiness. When the worldly life offers absolutely nothing but degenerating poverty, endless misery and a depressing perspective of still deeper degradation, the hope and promise of a mysterious life of eternal happiness can easily become the motive for the renunciation of the sinking ship, and for incredible acts of penance, asceticism and devotion to merit the tempting goal.

It is a natural impulse to run away from a house, however dear it might have been once, when it cracks and crumbles into a dreary desolation defying all efforts to repair. The natural instinct of self-preservation acquires the aura of pious heroism and admirable selflessness only because it is followed with greater enthusiasm, quickened by the alluring vision of a promised land flowing with milk and honey. Simple prudence assumes the complexion of admirable piety. Despair appears in

the dazzling garb of devotion. Natural selfishness undergoes a miraculous metamorphosis, and haughtily misappropriates the doubtful glory of the religious fervour of renunciation. Still, to desert a sinking ship with the forlorn hope of reaching the safety of a welcome shore can hardly be distinguished as an act of exceptional bravery, even though it implies the risk of drifting in dark and unknown waters.

Under the hopeless conditions of social dissolution, the Christian doctrine of the end of the world was received with frightful credulity. Who would not run away from a world doomed to an early destruction? And since it was encouraged by the temptation of getting a place in the Kingdom of Heaven, the fearful flight naturally became as it were the stampede of a hungry mob towards an inexhaustible store of food. Similarly, when the Hindu persuades himself that the world is but a hallucination, he easily and often cheerfully foregoes its enjoyments, which are placed beyond his reach by the inequities of a religious society. The preconceived notion about the surety of the eternal bliss of a spiritual existence induces the imaginary renunciation of what is not possessed and will never be possessed. It is so very much like the disappointed fox who consoled himself with the deception that the grapes were sour.

Even such impious and temporal considerations as vanity and worldly power played their part in

the spread of monasticism. "It was naturally supposed that the pious and humble monks, who had renounced the world to accomplish the work of their salvation, were the best qualified for the spiritual government of the Christians. The reluctant hermit was torn from his cell, and seated, amidst acclamations of the people, on the Episcopal Throne ; the monasteries of Egypt, of Gaul and of the East supplied a regular succession of Saints and Bishops ; and ambition soon discovered the secret road which led to the possession of wealth and honour.....The popular monks insinuated themselves into noble and opulent homes ; and specious acts of flattery and seduction were employed to secure those proselytes who might bestow wealth or dignity on the monastic profession..... The credulous maid was betrayed by vanity to violate the laws of nature ; and the matron aspired to imaginary perfection by renouncing the virtues of domestic life." (Gibbon).

A critical study of the monastic and akin institutions in India would reveal not a very different picture. Describing the religious Convention of Kanauj, convened by king Harsha-Vardhan (in the first half of the seventh century) and presided over by the famous Chinese monk Huen Tsang, Havell writes : "These great church dignitaries from monasteries like that of Nalanda were mounted on elephants ; others were carried in palanquins ; they were attended by a numerous suit." The Conven-

tion over, for twenty days treasures were distributed to the delegates, over ten thousand of whom received hundred pieces of gold each in addition to rich garments, jewels and perfumes. In the period of Buddhist ascendancy, the Sanghas enjoyed great political power as well as vast material riches. Subsequently, the wealth of the Hindu Maths and Temples became fabulous. The monastic orders and priestly hierarchy, while preaching the virtue of renunciation, lived a life of opulence and comfort. Imaginary, often fraudulent, spiritual elevation brought material splendour and temporal power to those who might have remained in obscure poverty, had they not resorted to the pretention, imagination, and fraud of a holy life. Renunciation guaranteed the practitioner of the comfortable cult the means of material subsistence as well as honour, prestige and power. Even to-day, the Sadhu enjoys a privileged position in Hindu society. So much so that, while the producing masses are economically bankrupt, the society supports no less than five million religious vagabonds and parasites.

In India, monasticism became rampant during the Buddhist period and continued flourishing after the triumph of Hindu reaction. It was in the latter period that the numerous orders of Sadhus and Sanyasis came into existence.

The Buddhist monk Upagupta was accompanied by eighteen thousand followers when he

met his royal disciple Asoka who distributed eleven lakh pieces of gold coins to the assembled mendicants. The number of religious beggars attending king Harsha's charitable feasts at Prayag, about a thousand years later, was still larger. A very substantial percentage of the adult population must have swelled the monastic order during those thousand years. It is recorded that the best part of the manhood of the kingdom of Magadha entered the monastic life. Buddhist monasticism was analogous to its Christian prototype. Both represented despair caused by the collapse of the old social order, and a vain effort to solve the problems of life by running away from it.

Asceticism is a perverse ideal—of a morbid mentality. Individual suicide is generally considered to be a reprehensible act. Throughout history, there has been difference of opinion regarding the morality and legality of the act of individual self-destruction. With all the arguments for and against suicide, it is an incontestable psychological deduction that suicide is committed as a rule in a state of temporary insanity. The virtue of asceticism represents an epidemic of this mental malady. It implies the spread of suicidal mania on a large scale. In other words, the holy man is an assassin. One may be granted the freedom to destroy his tormented self, and his morbid action may be excused as a token of individual insanity. But the cult of asceticism, if practised widely, becomes an

instrument of homicidal mania. Insanity becomes a crime. Individually, the ascetic is to be pitied for his or her depraved insanity ; the cult, however, is a veritable crime against humanity. The only saving grace is not the silly notion about its spiritualising power, but that it is a social disease as all crimes are when a particular social system is caught in such a severe crisis as overwhelms the multitude with utter despair, so that suicidal mania finds a fertile field. Insanity becomes epidemic. The world is full of incurable sorrows and suffering ; the only way out is to run away from the world, and seek consolation in the dream of a better existence transcending that of the senses. Parenthood stands in the way of this only escape. Even in the chaos of social decomposition, spiritual egoism cannot always get the better of biological laws expressing themselves as love and affection. Therefore, to secure spiritual uplift, man must sink below the level of animal ; must destroy his offsprings even before they are born. He must not only make a monstrosity of himself by the futile effort to violate all the laws of nature ; he must destroy the posterity, thereby committing gross violence against mother nature herself.

Multiplication is the law of nature. The social value of asceticism, when it first appeared as a wide-spread cult, was somewhat analogous to that of the modern proletarian movement of birth-control. Conscientious people are reluctant to

breed progeny when they are not in the position to perform their parental duties. But the restraint thus applied to propagation is an obligatory, temporary measure. There will be no need for it as soon as the social conditions are changed. It does not represent a stupid condemnation of life. Besides, the modern movement of birth-control does not propose stifling of the sexual instinct; therefore, the temporary restraint of propagation does not make mental monstrosities out of the living generation. But nationalism was unknown to the multitude caught in the crises of the antique social order. The scope and practice of asceticism could not be circumscribed by the consciousness of its social value. It was not associated with a conscious revolutionary struggle for overthrowing the decayed social system, which so hopelessly clouded the perspective of life, with the purpose of building up a new society. It reflected the despair of the victims of the crisis. It was an integral part of the ideology of social dissolution.

Not to plunge other souls in the ocean of worldly sorrows, is a motive nobler than spiritual egoism. Nevertheless, it also amounts to the same thing—a reprehensible attempt to destroy the human race. Had religion any place for logic, loyalty or true idealism, then the religious man should revolt against the sinful cult which recommends the destruction of the noblest creation of God. The teaching of religion is that God created

man after his own image. When religion becomes a crime against God himself, there must be something radically wrong with it.

The ascetic is a defeatist. His defeatism is the product of the depressingly hopeless social conditions that surround him. As soon as those conditions change, the disease growing out of them necessarily abates and gradually disappears. That was the case with the European society which succeeded in the struggle to come out of the chaos resulting from the decomposition of the antiquated society. The virus of Christian monasticism was a passing phenomenon. Monasteries outgrew their original negative features ; gradually, they came to play a positive social role as productive units which constituted the corner-stone of a new social order. In India, the social crisis became a chronic disease, the ugly symptoms of which perpetuated themselves as so many specific features of a special type of culture. Raising defeatism on the proud pedestal of imaginary and often fraudulent spirituality, Indian society abjured the path of struggle. It stagnated into a fossilised existence, the "conservative genius" of which choked the internal forces of disruption and progress, but could not resist violent impacts from outside. The Hindu ideal of Brahmacharya is a hideous heritage of a tragic past.

In the world of early Christianity as well as in India, monasteries were filled mostly by the destitute who gained much more in the new life of

renunciation than they had actually sacrificed. It has been ascertained by critical historians that the great majority of the inmates of the Christian monasteries were pauperised peasants, run-away slaves and destitute artisans. For those unfortunate victims of a social catastrophe the new life was a welcome escape from hopeless poverty, unbearable extortions and endless hardships. They left a perilous life of dishonour and contempt for a safe and laudable profession. The destitute and down-trodden scum of the earth became the chosen elite whose entrance into the glorious Kingdom of Heaven was assured. The austerities of monastic life were a very inconsiderable price to be paid for the invaluable reward. The physical hardships and privations of the holy profession were easily borne by the brothers and sisters accustomed to manual labour in the world. They were borne cheerfully, since those enlisted in the service of the God were guaranteed the indispensable necessities of life, which had not been always and easily available to them before. The ecclesiastical historian Tilement writes that in Egypt, for example, "a monk lived more comfortably than a shepherd". No wonder that destitute shepherds enthusiastically embraced monastic life, which transformed them into proud and privileged leaders of the swarms of devout bipeds, instead of the scarce and costly sheep they no longer possessed to tend.

For more than two hundred years all the

inmates of the Buddhist monasteries were also recruited from the poor oppressed classes. Havell writes : " For over two centuries, the Buddhist Sanghas were not influential enough to win many powerful patrons among the Aryan aristocracy, either Brahman or Kshatriya. It became the State religion only after it had outgrown its original revolutionary fervour. Then the doors of the opulent monasteries were closed to the down-trodden. It was ordained by the temporal laws that the Sanghas should not be used as a means of escaping secular obligations or evading the laws of the State. No one could enter them to avoid payment of debts ; criminals under punishment, deserters from royal services and slaves were also excluded." Evidently, until then the Sanghas had offered a hospitable refuge to those unfortunate social outcastes.

The social background of the Christian cult of monasticism has been depicted by Gibbon as follows : " The subjects of Rome, whose persons and fortunes were made responsible for unequal and exorbitant tributes, retired from the oppression of the imperial government ; and pusillanimous youths preferred the penance of a monastic, to the dangers of a military life. The afrighted provincials of every rank, who fled before the barbarians, found shelter and subsistence (in monasteries) ; whole legions were buried in these religious sanctuaries ; and the same cause which relieved the distress of individuals impaired the strength of the

empire." In many a classical treatise on the Roman law, particularly the Justinian Code, we read of measures to enforce the private and public obligations of citizenship; but the laws of a decrepit government were too feeble a dam to resist the fierce current of superstition so bountifully fed with the consternation caused by an insurmountable social chaos.

Exactly similar causes were in operation also in India. As an admirer of the spiritual essence of Indo-Aryan culture, Havell can be trusted to make a proper appreciation of monasticism. Nevertheless, he writes: "Monastic life was held in so high esteem and offered so many attractions to the Kshatriya youths, that the fighting strength of Aryawarta was becoming dangerously weakened, and the resources of the State needed for national defence were absorbed by the thousands of monasteries, filled with the wearers of the yellow robe." Again, "The conquest of Sindh by the Arabs was made easy by the fact that thousands of the male population had adopted the yellow robe for the sake of the easy life of the monastery. The monastic system continued to absorb a large proportion of the flower of Indian manhood even after the development of Brahman philosophy".

All the persecutions and repressions of the Hindu kings proved impotent to stem the tide of Buddhist Nihilism. Pushyamitra, who overthrew the Buddhist Maurya dynasty and assumed the

leadership of Brahmanical reaction, deprived the monastic order of all power in the State, acquired since the time of Asoka. Monasteries were forcibly dissolved, and monks persecuted everywhere. Yet, monasticism could not be stamped out. It kept on flourishing in the face of persecution. Monasticism had become such a serious social menace that, after the death of Asoka, the Maurya rulers tried to check its ruinous progress by imposing heavy penalties upon those who left their families without provision. But the flood tide of social dissolution could not be resisted. It swept away the splendid empire of the Mauryas.

The sagacity of the Indian Constantine, Asoka, sought, and to some extent succeeded, to furnish the ideology of social dissolution for the defence and even consolidation of the decayed social order by pandering demonstratively to the vanity of monasticism. Under the royal patronage of Asoka and his successors, Buddhism stopped short of running its cataclysmic course of Nihilism ; and that very deviation from its basic principle ultimately caused the downfall of Buddhism and the re-establishment of Brahman orthodoxy. In order to be victorious, Christianity also capitulated to the obstinate forces of pagan superstition ; but the hybrid religion of the Catholic Church retained the original name of Christianity. In the case of Buddhism, the capitulation was complete. Even the name had to go, in return for a place conceded

to its founder in the list of the legendary Avatars of Hinduism. The superstitious practices of Hinduism corrupted and caused the downfall of Buddhism. But the vanquished was avenged by the fact that its most characteristic feature—monasticism—passed on to the triumphant religion. The hero of the conquering host, Sankaracharya himself, was the founder of the most powerful and abiding monastic order.

Critical investigation will bring into light the fact that behind the apparent prosperity of the Buddhist era, there operated similar social forces as promoted the abnormal phenomenon of monasticism in the period of decay and decline of the Roman Empire. Meanwhile, recorded history as well as social science warrant the assertion that the great majority of the Buddhist monks, and later on Hindu Sadhus and Sanyasis, must have been recruited from the masses of peasants and artisans rendered destitute and desperate by all the factors indicating a severe social crisis, namely, decay of the roots of the established economic system, the resulting decline of industry and trade, pauperisation of the masses, increasing burden of taxation and various other forms of extortions, and political oppression. Before the establishment of Buddhism as the State religion, propagandists of the new faith—Bhikkhus—travelled from village to village, preaching to the poor, destitute and the outcastes. Old records show that the majority of

the monks and nuns were recruited from the villages, that is, from the economically ruined and socially oppressed masses.

Uncritical historians, particularly those with nationalist predilections, confound the greatness with the happiness of a nation. The greatness of a nation in the past is erroneously measured by the magnificence of the royal court and the opulence of the ruling aristocracy. It is conveniently overlooked who paid for that greatness and splendour, and what was the condition of the multitude who tilled and toiled so that the rulers could put on the flattering garb of greatness, magnificence, and renown. Invariably, the life of the multitude was devoted, not voluntarily but under duress, to produce the material that went into the making of that glorious garb of equivocal greatness.

In the early and mediaeval ages, the productivity of labour was necessarily much lower than at present. Consequently, exceptional grandeur of royal cities, imposing magnificence of courts, flaunting extravagance of the nobility, vain stateliness of public and private architecture and the wasteful richness of temples and mausoleums, were not possible unless national income was very disproportionately distributed. As a matter of fact, those very monuments of national greatness testify to the endless oppression and grinding poverty of the masses. They represented a futile effort to conceal the decay of the established social order and the

consequent destitution and degradation of the people. Historical research has revealed the fact that external splendour of the Roman Empire reached the apex just when the barbarous system of slavery was eating into the very foundations of the imperial structure. That was the era of Augustus and Constantine. Later on, Justinian satisfied his vanity of eclipsing the magnificence of his vain-glorious predecessors just when the economic fabrics of the empire were in ruins, and wide-spread bankruptcy and destitution of the toiling masses were flaming the superstition of monasticism.

For the construction of the Great Wall of China, more than twenty-five per cent of the entire social labour was withdrawn from productive activities. The result inevitably was a disastrous famine which reduced the population of the country by half. It was precisely in that period that Buddhist monasticism flourished in China, and the impatience for the bliss of Nirwana urged thousands of unhappy fanatics to the incredible practice of hurling themselves down from high mountains which, by virtue of those inhuman acts, acquired the reputation of possessing miraculous charms.

There is absolutely no reason to believe that the national grandeur of India from the time of Asoka to the reign of Harsha-Vardhan and right up to the invasion of Mahmud of Ghazni was reared upon a different social basis. Had it been so, the same

period of greatness would not find such a considerable part of the population abandoning the natural life of a social being to adopt the morbid monastic profession. Had the people enjoyed worldly happiness when their rulers were basking in the sun of grandeur and glory, they would not rush madly after an illusion, leaving the reality behind. Havell writes : "Every great temple which was built, meant the dedication of public and private funds for the maintenance of priests, temple servants, Brahman students and their gurus, Sadhus and Sanyasis. And it was the period from the seventh century to the time of Mahmud of Ghazni, which was the most prolific in religious building,—a time when Hindu monarchs vied with each other in the magnificence and number of their temples, when sacred hills were converted into cities of the gods, and when hundreds and thousands of skilled artisans were diverted from ordinary industrial pursuits to the pious labour of elaborating the embellishment of the temple service in stone, bronze, precious metal and costly fabrics." (The Aryan Rule of India)

It was not an easy task to preserve the holy appearance of an abnormal institution embracing an ever-increasing multitude of social derelicts, actuated by motives far from being genuinely spiritual. It was however, accomplished through the destruction of the freedom of mind by fomenting the virtue of credulity and encouraging the

merit of submission. The mind of a superstitious crowd steeped in ignorance and trembling with fear, submitted to the most absurd and atrocious habits, the fanatical practice of which would be rewarded surely with salvation, and possibly even with worldly fame, power and prestige. Austerities, that have been claimed as the special merit of the holy men of India, were carried to incredible extent by Christian monks. Pleasure and guilt were synonymous terms in the monastic vocabulary of India as well as of any other country inflicted by the disease. Everywhere impure desires of the flesh were mortified by the rigours of fast and abstemiousness. Church Fathers like Saint Jerome were enthusiastically eloquent about the spiritual effect of fasting and abstinence. The inmates of Eastern monasteries—disciples of Anthony and Pachonius—lived on the pittance of twelve ounces of dry bread a day, and had to perform hard labour to keep their minds away from evil thoughts. Nights were devoted to prayer, penance and meditation. Meat eating was strictly forbidden, and water was the only beverage compatible with the spiritual life of a man. The early Christian ideal of evangelical poverty was the last word of the doctrine of renunciation. On entering the holy life, the monk abjured all earthly possessions, the cloak on his back was not to be called his own. The holy man lived on alms or the product of manual labour performed in the service of God.

Such a comfortless and barren life was naturally tormented by evil spirits, which are nothing but the vision of vainly suppressed desires and haunted by hallucinations. The life of every Christian Saint is a tale of heroic struggle against the temptation of Satan and of miraculous victories over those sources of evil. Since every prisoner of monasticism was either a miniature or an incipient saint, he also must experience the struggles and triumphs of the thorny road to holiness. How familiar are we in India with the tales of such spiritual exploits ! But here as well as in many other countries, these tales were so hungrily devoured by the credulous multitude, because the hopeless conditions of their miserable life could be possibly changed only by a miracle. Recording some of those legends about the Christian Saints, and exposing their spurious origin, Gibbon writes : "These extravagant tales, which display the fiction, without the genius of poetry, have seriously affected the reason, the faith, and the morals of the Christians. Their credulity debased and vitiated the faculties of the mind ; they corrupted the evidence of history ; and superstition gradually extinguished the hostile light of philosophy and science. Every mode of religious worship which had been practised by the Saints, every mysterious doctrine which they had believed, was fortified by the sanction of divine revelation, and all the manly virtues

were oppressed by the servile and pusillanimous reign of the monks."

One composing a critical history of ancient India could use this admirable passage verbatim for summarising our spiritual heritage, which has been such a stout bulwark of reaction for centuries, and has contributed so much to our present unenviable plight. The European nations recovered from the virulent plague germinated in the putrid carcass of the once magnificent Roman Empire, as soon as the advance of knowledge raised the depressing gloom hanging upon life. The happy dawn of knowledge was caused by the rise of forces building a new social order. Only the faith in the endless possibilities of worldly life can persuade man to abandon the vain chase after the will-o'-the-wisp of an imaginary sublimer existence which disregards all reality. This wild race after a chimera ceases only when man regains faith in himself, and by the strength of advancing knowledge throws off the influence of credulity, prejudice and superstition.

The supine complacency and idle pride regarding the sublimity of our spiritual heritage should no longer lull the critical faculty of progressive Indians. Legendary glorification of a past sickness should not curb the striving for a fuller life of health and real happiness. But, for the purpose deceptive bubbles must be burst, legends deprived of the fraudulent garb of history, and credulity

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confronted with criticism. Unless we know how to read correctly the history of our past, we shall never be able to survive our present degradation, and conquer a future of real greatness.

CHAPTER VI

THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVOLUTION

"We live in an age of science. Most people think that science has served humanity by producing electric light, motor cars, aeroplanes etc. That is only a partial view. In fact, few realise the outlook that science has produced during the last two hundred years. Science has given us a new view of the universe....."

"The future of India depends on a courageous application of scientific knowledge. As man learns to apply the scientific method to the problems of every day life, in that measure he will rise to and reach his allotted height. Let the dogs of conservatism, ignorance and fanaticism bark, but the glorious caravan of the Indian nation will move on with irresistible force."—Sir C. V. Raman.*

How many of the graduates—the trusted and sanguine custodians of India's future—fully grasped the revolutionary implication of the momentous utterance? Lest it should be drowned in the din of doubtful wisdom and platitudinous preachings, that fill the intellectual atmosphere of our country, the progressive youth might profitably remember, and reflect upon the weighty utterance of the distinguished savant.

One of the greatest scientists of our days, very creditably for himself, advocates a philosophical

* At the Convocation of the University of Bombay, 1932.

revolution as the condition for the much delayed, but inevitable, national Renaissance of India. The adoption of a scientific outlook, the application of the scientific method to the problems of life, will necessarily mean the rejection of ideas, ideals, institutions and traditions which are erroneously cherished as the peculiar features of Indian culture and to preserve and glorify which has consequently become an article of faith of Indian Nationalism. The posture of standing with the face turned backward is obviously incompatible with any striving for progress. The method and point of departure must be changed before any advance is possible.

Scientific outlook is essentially materialistic—a term so very misunderstood and piously abhorred generally in India. At any rate, scientific outlook is free from preconceived notions. It does not take anything for granted. It does not admit miracles, occasional or perpetual. It seeks, and eventually finds, the cause of every phenomenon in order to understand that particular phenomenon and its connection with others. Whenever an event or appearance happens to defy understanding, and seems to disregard or transcend all the known laws of nature, the scientific mind does not call in the aid of prejudice and superstition. It simply admits its inability to comprehend the cause of the apparent miracle, but with the firm conviction that diligent and dispassionate investigation will, sooner or later, unravel what for the moment appears to

be a mystery. Empirically established laws of nature are never suspended to make manifest supernatural powers. In short, scientific outlook does not admit of the possibility of something coming out of nothing. There is a causal connection in the interminable chain of events. The scientific mind rejects the theological maxim: "Ex nihili ominium" in favour of the thesis of the ancient Greeks: "Ex nihili nihil". Scientific outlook is based on positive knowledge, not on belief, speculation or fantasy. As such, it is hostile to the religious, metaphysical, teleological view of the Universe, life, history and society. This view is opposed to all free enquiry. Its pivot is authority which defies or eludes test. It declares human knowledge not only imperfect, but unreliable, placing it within insurmountable bounds.

Scientific method is inductive—to reach the general from the particular, the abstract from the concrete, the unknown from the known. The spiritual view of life follows in contrast the deductive method—to start from an assumption, a hypothesis, which can never be verified, to explain phenomena in the light (?) of an unknown and unknowable noumenon.

The religious, metaphysical, teleological view of life—a view that arrogates the pious distinction of spiritualism and starts from an assumption or unverifiable hypothesis, a Divine Providence, Cosmic Will, First Principle or Final Cause—is not a

special genius of India. It dominates the life of every man, everywhere, until the sublime light of science dawns upon him, and dissipates the mist of ignorance, prejudice and superstition that has previously clouded his understanding. As long as he is not able to explain the multitudinous phenomena of nature that surround, surprise and often terrify him, he rather helplessly than piously attributes their cause to some providential agency. Since his own life is actuated by motives, he imagines a Cosmic Will behind the natural phenomena which appear to be so well adapted and regulated for his benefit. Inside and outside himself, man finds an infinite variety of things advantageous to himself, for example, his physical organs and mental capacities, as well as the sun, air, water etc. These useful things have been made neither by himself nor by any other man before. So, there must be a final cause for them all. The unscientific mind cannot conceive of such well regulated things happening by themselves, without a plan made and directed by an intelligent force, which by its very nature must be omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. He never stops to ask how did the final cause come into being. That would be irreligious.

Thus assumed by the ignorance of man, the hypothetical being (which might pass under any of the various denominations—God, Universal

Soul, Divine Providence, First Principle, Final Cause etc.) becomes the supreme object and the inexhaustible source of all knowledge. Intellectual and spiritual activity of man becomes a long, dismal search for a light which always recedes before any approach, luring the unfortunate votary into a confusion confounded progressively by the vanity of virtue. But there have been candid souls who would rather admit defeat than seek the questionable glory of self-deception or fraudulent victory. For instance, the venerable Roman philosopher, Seneca, pathetically declared that the longer he contemplated Plato's sublime conception of the Triad (the First Cause, the Logos and the Universal Soul), the less he could grasp of it. In such vain pursuit, philosophy degenerates into a dreary record of endless dispute, or pedantic dissertations about the nature of an hypothetical being which must always remain a hypothesis, since it could never be verified by the vulgar, but the only reliable, test of experience.

Ideas, ideals, institutions and traditions, that are fondly cherished as the token of the supposed superiority of India's culture, belong to the dark ages of humanity, when prejudice parades in the garb of piety, ignorance claims the sublimity of virtue, and idle speculation puts on the dignity of philosophy. The spell is broken ultimately by the first conquests of science.

The epoch-making discoveries of Galileo, Copernicus and Kepler shattered the foundation of the time-honoured religious philosophy, and the metaphysical outlook of Universe and life. It was found that observation of natural phenomena without any preconceived notion led to conclusions which upset the celestial and terrestrial order sanctioned by religious theory. A philosophical revolution took place. A radical change in the outlook on the problems of the Universe, life, history and society became inevitable. That change was a condition for the great political revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which ushered in the marvellous era of modern civilisation.

The definite inauguration of a new philosophy on the basis of experimental science and the inductive method of reasoning, is associated with the names of Francis Bacon and Descartes. It will be interesting and instructive to recollect Bacon's characterisation of the old orthodox method that he set out to combat, and enunciation of the new he advocated. "Whence can arise such vagueness and sterility in all the physical systems which have hitherto existed in the world? It is not certainly from anything in nature itself; for the steadiness and regularity of the laws by which it is governed clearly mark them out as objects of certain and precise knowledge. It can therefore arise from nothing else but the perverseness and insufficiency

of the methods which have been pursued. Men have sought to make the world from their own conception, and to draw from their own minds all the materials which they employed; but if, instead of doing so, they had consulted experience and observation, they would have had facts, and not opinions, to reason about, and might have ultimately arrived at the knowledge of the laws which govern the material world. As things are at present conducted, a sudden transition is made from sensible objects and particular facts, to general propositions which are accepted principles, and round which, as round so many fixed poles, disputations and arguments continually revolve. From the propositions thus hastily assumed, all things are derived by a process compendious and precipitate, ill suited to discovery, but wonderfully accommodated to debate. The way that promises success is the reverse of this. It requires that we should generalise slowly, going from particular things to those that are but one step more general; from those to others of still greater extent, and soon to such as are universal. By such means we may hope to arrive at principles, not vague and obscure, but luminous and well-defined, such as nature herself will not refuse to accept. I propose to establish progressive stages of certainty. The evidence of sense, helped and guarded by a certain process of correction, I retain; but the mental operation which follows the act of sense, I, for

the most part, reject, and instead of it, I open and lay out a new and certain path for the mind to proceed in, starting directly from the simple sensuous perceptions."

With all his brilliance, Bacon, however, felt his unexplored way with caution and prudence. He avoided a frontal attack upon the established creeds and institutions of religion, while dexterously shaking its very foundation. He adopted a clever stratagem. He did not deny the existence of God or the immortality of the soul, but pleaded that these basic questions of faith should be answered by philosophy instead of by theology; that is to say, by reason instead of by dogma. Once God and soul are placed under the step-motherly care of philosophy, nothing but dire misfortune can overtake these venerable prejudices. You can just as well take a fish out of water and let it thrive on the high and dry land. Disguised as an humble faithful, the infidel threw down the fateful gauntlet to Faith together with her shady entourage of teleology, theology and metaphysics which had for ages served as so many fetters for the spirit of man. The war thus declared over three hundred years ago, is still being waged. Science has scored splendid victories; but she had to fight every inch of the ground. With desperate tenacity prejudice had resisted its advancing opponent; and the final victory of science is still to be won.

Descartes opened the attack more courageously than his older contemporary. His starting point was absolute doubt about everything the reality and veracity of which could not be established by sense perception. The rejection of authority as the unquestionable testimony for truth logically led to the deposition of theology from the proud position it had occupied for more than a thousand years. Nothing should be accepted as true unless it were proved to be so, and the standard of truth was not authority or the mystic fantasy called revelation, but reason. In expounding his memorable theory of vortices, Descartes, indeed, made a concession to the time-honoured prejudice regarding the origin of creation; but the sheer formality of his accommodating attitude was unmistakably exposed by the cynical remark that "yet it would be of eminent interest to see how the Universe might have evolved by itself". In the bloody age of heresy hunting, the very postulation of such a hypothesis represented great boldness which could proceed only from a firm scientific conviction. The Cartesian theory of vortices marks the beginning of modern physics and cosmology. It was the continuation of ancient atomism, propounded by the philosophers of ancient Greece,—Democritos and Epicuros—in the brilliant light of knowledge which had been all but extinguished in the dark ages of religiosity, miracles and revealed wisdom. Since the days of Descartes, physics has

advanced with giant strides, pushing aside his ingenious hypothesis which, nevertheless, will always retain the great merit of having boldly blazed the trail of progress—of inaugurating a new era of spiritual freedom. The great merit of the Cartesian hypothesis was that it constructed a physical system in which the forced assumption of an original creator appeared to be entirely superfluous, the process of the evolution of the Universe being purely mechanical, the creator having absolutely no power to alter the minutest detail.

Both the founders of the scientific method emphatically repudiated the prejudice of a Final Cause. In view of this decisive negative attitude regarding the cardinal principle of religion and theology, their forced and formal recognition of the existence of God loses the cogency of conviction. Descartes wrote: "We can only presume it (the first creation by god), since God did not take us into his counsel. This habit of searching for a Final Cause has no use for the knowledge of physical and natural things. In physics, the appeal to a Final Cause is idle, since every conclusion must rest on solid ground."

The philosophical revolution heralded by Bacon and Descartes triumphantly marched ahead during the last three hundred years. With its iconoclastic methods, science advanced steadily, showing how flagrantly the certainties of experience contradicted, and were contradicted by, the

notions and fantasies which had been raised on the proud pedestal of eternal truth by authority and superstition. Time-honoured articles of faith, teleological explanation of the problems of nature and society, the misty wisdom of metaphysics—all these landmarks of the spiritualist view of life could not stand the test of inductive enquiry. It became evident that, should the old mode of thought remain in force, should established doctrines, dogmas and authority continue to govern the life of man, individually and socially, his own experience must be disbelieved, knowledge must be fearfully shunned as the serpent in the garden of Eden, superstition must be cherished as spirituality, ignorance adored as virtue, vain fantasy accorded the distinction of revealed wisdom, and we should still appeal to Popes and priests for the answer to the problems of the physical and social sciences. But the imperious advance of knowledge enabled man to withdraw more and more phenomena from the inscrutable will of supernatural agencies, and trace their causes to immanent properties and mechanical laws of nature.

Still, whenever and wherever science failed to give fully satisfactory explanation of all the phenomena, man continued to place reliance upon supernatural agencies supposing them to be beyond the reach of science and maintaining in consequence that the defective and imperfect scientific

knowledge, which could never attain the absolute truth, was itself possible only owing to the "divine spark" in man. The inscrutable will and invisible hand of the Almighty were triumphantly detected whenever the mechanical laws of nature were not yet discovered or the operation of them appeared to be suspended by the intervention of unforeseen factors. Ignorance became the shrine of God, the only argument in favour of religion. Hence there were men, with a completely scientific outlook in astronomical, physical and chemical problems, but who refuse to apply the scientific method in the investigation of the organic world, particularly in human affairs. Biology and psychology still remained confused by theological and metaphysical prejudices.

It is, however, no paradox that so many scientifically minded men, even some great scientists themselves, should linger under the waning influence of religion and metaphysics. The cause of the apparent paradox was the specialisation of scientific study. Scientists had to devote themselves wholly to particular branches of investigation. Consequently, their vision was circumscribed by the happenings in small limited fields which were but minute fractions of the vast domain of the Universe. Sole occupation with particular groups of phenomena made the average man of science lose sight of the comprehensive nature of scientific knowledge as a whole. As it

were, they fail to see the forest for the trees. The very creditable and profusely productive zeal for practice in detail eclipsed the broad vision of theory. In short, many scientists were not able to draw general philosophical consequences from their own discoveries and knowledge. The co-ordination of the vast knowledge, acquired in the diverse branches of science, was left to philosophy. But to perform that function, philosophy had to revolutionise herself.

The development of biology quickened the philosophical revolution. All animals lower than man had been characterised by Descartes as automata. The discovery that organisms were also governed by mechanical laws enabled the French philosopher de la Metrie to shock the prejudiced world by declaring that man was also a machine. Comparative anatomy traced the descent of man from lower forms of animals; and all the diverse phenomena of the organic world were reduced to a common point of origin which merged into the primordial unity of inorganic matter. The mysterious entity life was discovered to be nothing but a property of organic matter. Ideas were proved to be the production of mind, which in its turn is a function of a material organ, the brain. In consequence of all these revolutionary discoveries regarding the mysterious vital phenomena as well as the so-called spiritual essence of man, the old conception of soul—the immortal divine spark in

man—appeared to be only an imagination. With its individual expression, the universal soul must also go.

While each great discovery of science dealt a staggering blow to the hoary castle of religion, built in the air of faith, and consequently added stone after stone to the solid foundation of the philosophy of Materialism, prejudice persisted by virtue of momentum. In course of time, the progress of the philosophical revolution was retarded by the change in the social position of the rising bourgeois class. Struggling to liberate themselves from feudal bondage, the bourgeoisie had found a powerful weapon in the revolutionary philosophical consequences of science. By repudiating the authority of religion and theology, science destroyed the ideological foundation and moral justification of the feudal social order. The bourgeoisie preached and practised the "sacred right of revolt" in temporal as well as in spiritual matters, and became the ruling power. In a changed situation, advantageous to themselves, their philosophical outlook changed. As an oppressed class, they had advocated revolution, ideological as well as political. In power, they became conservative. Without authority, there could be no domination of one class over the entire society ; an authority on earth could not be firmly established unless backed, directly or indirectly, by some supernatural sanction. So, faith and religion

were rescued from their ruins. For the vulgar, the old discredited God with all his threadbare paraphernalia, was again allowed to rule ; the intellectual elite, however, had become too sophisticated to relapse into crude belief, severely shaken, if not thoroughly exploded, by science. For their edification, religion appeared in the new garb of modern idealist philosophy. The untenable doctrine of a personal creator was replaced by the fascinating fantasy of the Absolute Idea. The bitterest critic of the Christian Church, the cynical Voltaire, himself became an advocate of the lost cause, and replied the atheism of the philosopher Pierre Bayle with the following argument : " If there is no God, we must discover one. Give Bayle five hundred peasants to rule, and he will immediately recognise the usefulness of religion." That was the most forceful argument against the case in the defense of which it was advanced. It showed up God and religion in their true role. A few decades later, Kant did not blush to proclaim that he must set aside science in order to make room for faith. Yet, his "all-shattering" critical philosophy has swept away all the debris of medieval speculation. His monumental work on the theory of Newton had driven God away even from the precarious position conceded by the latter.

If the selfish interest of the bourgeoisie came in conflict with the philosophical revolution, and sought to curb its progress, the future of mankind

required its culmination. Therefore, it was impossible to resist the historical striving for the proper appreciation of the far-reaching theoretical value of scientific discoveries in their entirety with the object of weaving them into a comprehensive system of philosophy. To disown the materialist tendency of its birth, modern philosophy launched upon the wild career of idealism which was raised to a giddy height by Hegel. In his eagerness to vindicate the basic principle of true philosophy—the primal unity of things—Hegel destroyed modern classical Idealism. Without a dualist conception of the Universe—matter and spirit—idealist philosophy is not possible. The monist conception must be either materialist, or be lost in the inextricable wilderness of solipsism or nihilism. If the original unity is reduced to a spiritual existence, the phenomenal world must be declared to be a hallucination. For, matter can never evolve out of pure spirit, except with the intervention of omnipotence which knows no law. With the postulate of such intervention, religion is restored to the throne of authority, and philosophy must accept a humble space at the foot of the throne. Besides, spirit itself cannot exist without being subordinated to the limitation of space, in which case it would cease to be what it claims to be. Since in the age of science and positive knowledge mankind cannot possibly believe that the grand process of the evolution of the Universe is a bad dream,

Materialism must be its philosophy, should it have any philosophy worth the name.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the lowered banner of philosophical revolution was raised again, this time by the ideologists of the toiling masses. The new leaders of the revolution were equipped with a formidable weapon forged by the latest and the greatest idealist philosopher, Hegel. It was the dialectic method of thought which ousted formal logic. Exposing the transitoriness of everything, and revealing the constant conception of a new in the womb of the passing old, dialectics put an end to all authority. No weapon could be more welcome to the leaders of the philosophical revolution. Out of the magnificent ruins of Hegelian Absolute Idealism, Feuerbach rescued the positive contribution of the classical philosophy as the basis of the "Philosophy of the Future"—Materialism. Armed with an encyclopedic knowledge of all the sciences, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels clearly and comprehensively stated the new outlook of life, opened by the discoveries of science during the preceding three hundred years. In the bright light of that materialist outlook, all the problems of nature, life, history and society, appear devoid of all mystery, and man attains the full height of his glory as the master of his fate.

Undoubtedly, even to-day, science has not penetrated into all the mysteries of the Universe.

But what has been conclusively established is the certainty of scientific knowledge, and that there is nothing unknowable. Our knowledge is not perfect—far from being so ; but there is no limit to our capacity to know. Besides, perfect knowledge is an ideal never to be attained, because when there will be nothing more to know, extinction will overtake mankind. Science has burst the bubble of absolute knowledge and eternal truth. Every-day we know more ; consequently, our knowledge is constantly rectified, enlarged and amplified. The summum bonum of scientific knowledge is that there is nothing fixed—everything is in a constant flux. The only thing eternal and immutable is perpetual change, and that this eternal phenomenon of change is governed by mechanical laws inherent in itself. Thus science justifies its name by merging itself into philosophy, and philosophy ceases to be idle and vain speculation to stand out in the fullness of the glory of the science of sciences.

END

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